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# FUSION



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**FUSION**

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## READER SURVEY

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KNOW WHAT  
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AND WHAT  
YOU WANT  
IN 2MINS



3DO GOLF



INDIE HEROES 2

For your monthly retro fix, join..

## FUSION

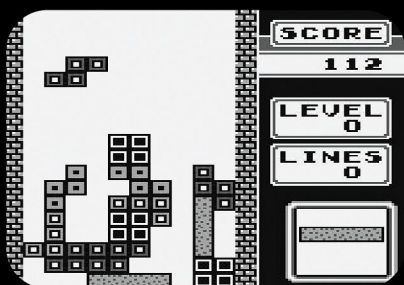
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# FUSION



GAME BOY



BLAST CORPS



ATOMIC HEART

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As I write this, a big yellow ball has appeared in the sky, and the birds are singing enthusiastically. Could it be Spring at last? It certainly feels like it. And, much like the weather, the gaming world appears to be entering its own season of growth after a long, cold winter. My news feed is bulging with new games for more systems than I can keep up with or find the time to play, and personally, I wouldn't have it any other way. Whether you're retro gaming or sampling the latest AAA titles, there is something for everyone right now.

This issue, we welcome the return of Retro Obscura, our feature on history's less popular and sometimes misunderstood consoles and computers. Alan Hammerton is restarting us at the beginning of home console history with Ralph Baer's Odyssey. Retro Faith brings us an interview with *Blast Corps* designer Martin Wakeley, Toy Polloi takes a look at some iconic characters, and we have reviews of Jeff Minter's reimagining of Atari's *Akka Arrh*, Mundfish's debut game *Atomic Heart*, and the *Indie Heroes Collection 2* cartridge for Evercade.

Amongst our other regular features is something new we're trying out for this issue: the Fusion Reactor. We hope you like it, and please let us know what you think via the usual channels. Or, you can take two minutes to let us know your thoughts via the Reader Survey to your left. All your feedback is appreciated (good or bad), and will help us keep making the content you want.

MISSION START!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Ben Honebone.

Editor  
Ben Honebone



REVIEW AKKA ARRH PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES, SWITCH, MAC, LINUX, PC (REVIEWED)

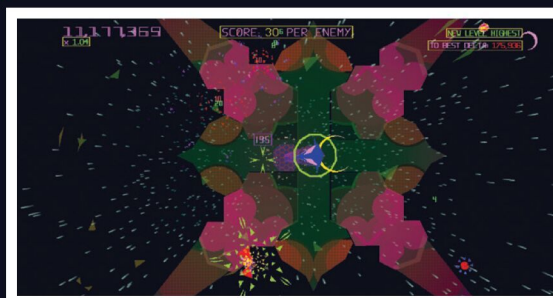
# AKKA ARRH

WORDS BY ANDREW FISHER



Atari and Digital Eclipse recently revealed the game *Akka Arrh* as part of the *Atari 50* collection, and this previously unreleased prototype was an exciting addition. The story behind the version playable in MAME is worth telling (see the **PROTOTYPE PLAY** boxout), but to keep this review pure, I played the remake before I played the original.

So, what is it, and why has Llamasoft remade it? If you are familiar with Jeff Minter's games, you will be expecting psychedelic colours, unusual sounds and quirky presentation powered by the visualisation tech of his partner Ivan



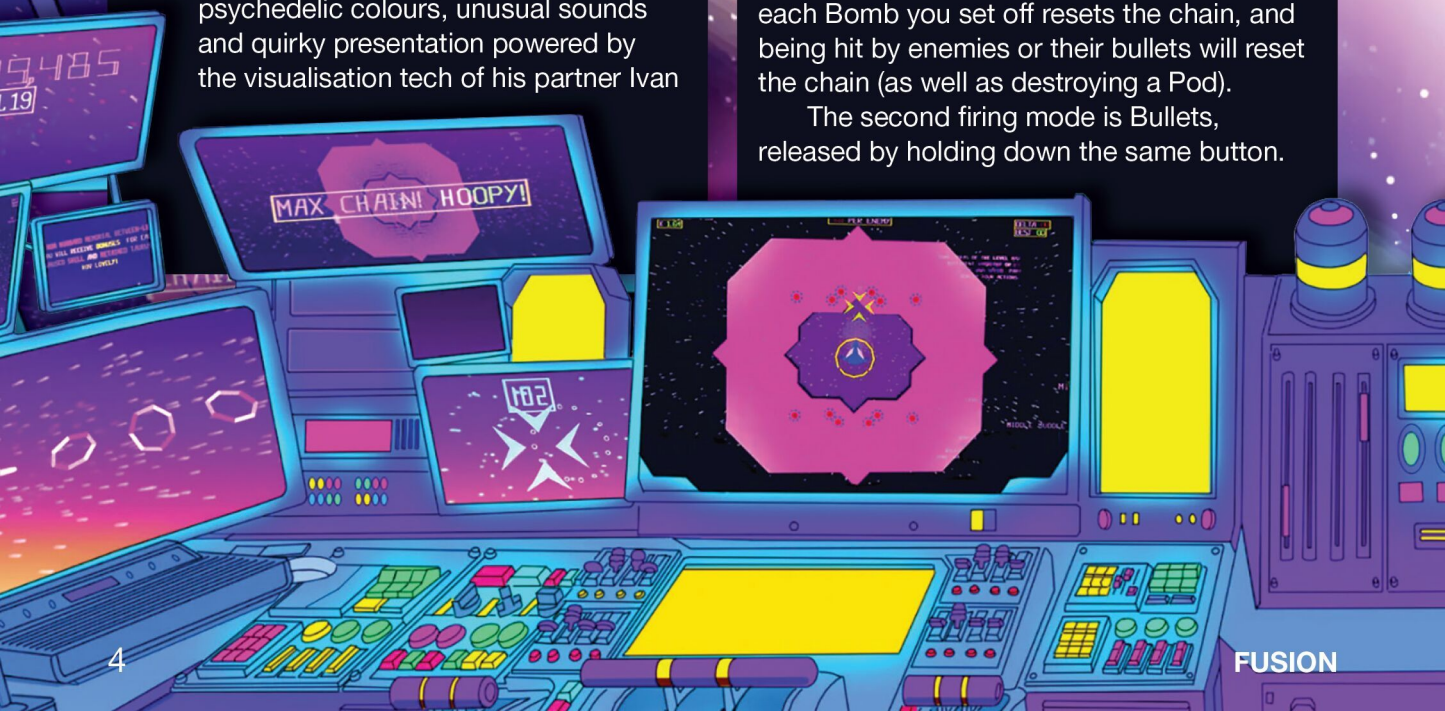
Above: Explosive symmetry on this level can really help.

Zorzin. These are all present and correct. A warning about epilepsy appears before play starts, and there is a helpful option to "subdue" the more extreme effects.

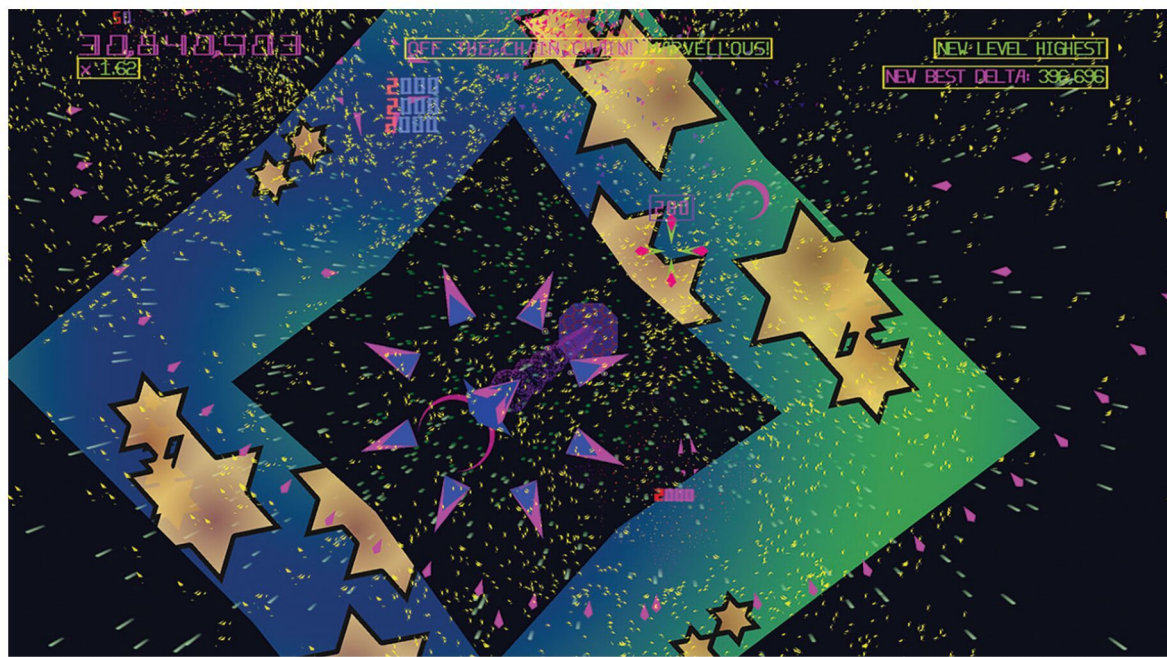
The actual gameplay is a subtle mixture of shoot 'em-up and tower defence strategy. You control the central turret (with the head of a bull) powered by 16 energy Pods that must be protected. Enemies enter from the edges of the screen, trying to reach the turret and plunder the Pods. The player uses a cursor to aim and fire, and this is where things get interesting.

There are two modes of firing, described here with the default controls. Tapping the button releases a Bomb aimed at the cursor. When it lands on the playfield, it sets off a Shockwave. Any enemy caught in a Shockwave will explode and set off its own Shockwave. The aim is to chain enemy shockwaves, earning more per hit. However, each Bomb you set off resets the chain, and being hit by enemies or their bullets will reset the chain (as well as destroying a Pod).

The second firing mode is Bullets, released by holding down the same button.







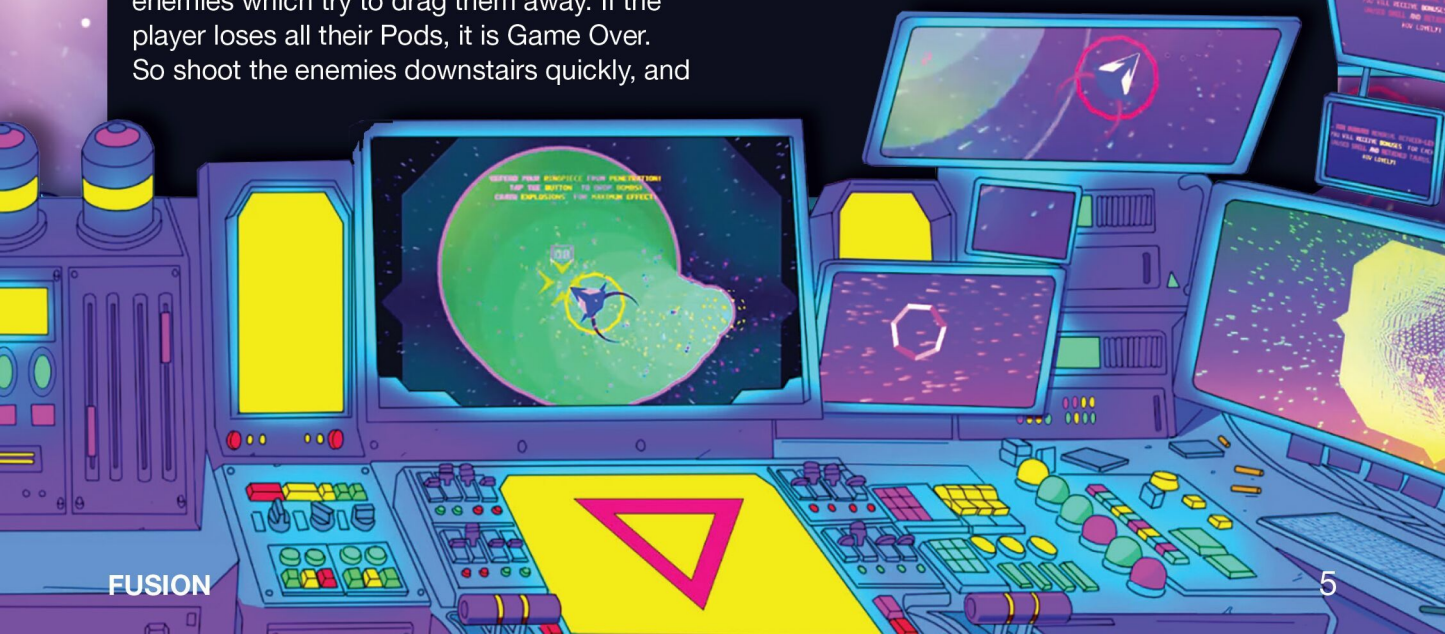
**Above:** We'll be counting stars - Akka Arrh praises you for long Chains with a particle shower of epic proportions.

Bullets do not reset the chain and are needed to kill certain flying enemies. These enemies will also release a Shockwave when killed. Certain enemies carry or fire bullets back at you, which must be shot to avoid being hit by them. For each enemy killed, you earn an extra Bullet. Run out of Bullets, and you cannot fire – relying on Bombs until you have earned more.

What happens when an enemy reaches the turret? Now the player must press the right trigger to “nip downstairs”, as the game calls it. The action switches to a smaller playfield, with the turret once again at the centre. Here you can see the surrounding Pods and the enemies which try to drag them away. If the player loses all their Pods, it is Game Over. So shoot the enemies downstairs quickly, and

you will be sent back upstairs with the sound of an air horn giving you the all-clear. Kill all the enemies on a level, and you get the score summary (see IT ALL ADDS UP) before moving on to the next.

As is typical with Llamasoft, there is more than one play mode. Pure Mode means starting from the beginning and playing for as many levels as you can beat, the goal being to beat all 50. These are separated into groups of eight, known as an Octave, with bonuses for surviving each set of eight. Resume Best allows you to restart at a higher level with the score and number of lives you had at that

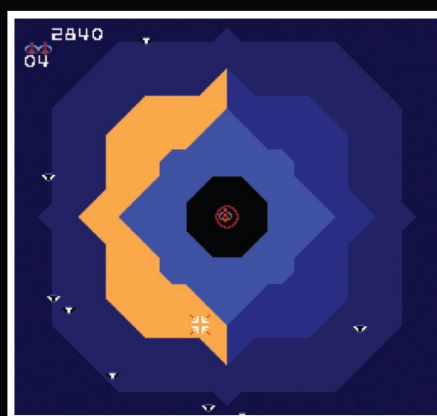




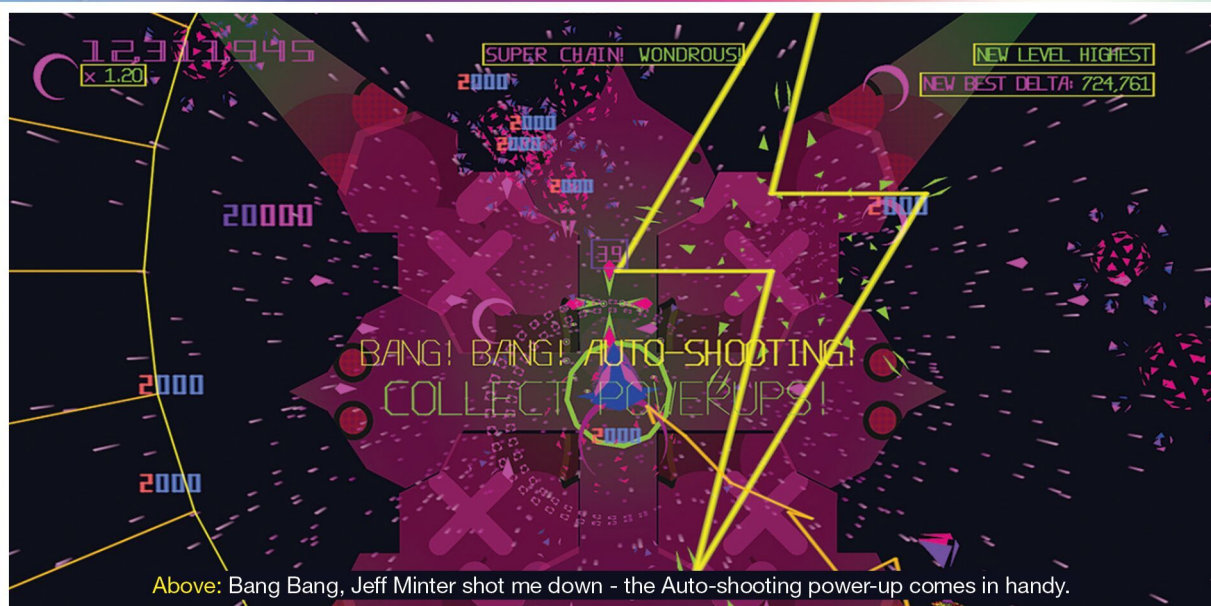
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## PROTOTYPE PLAY

Atari got the original *Akka Arrh* game ready to test on location in 1982, spending money on a dedicated cabinet with a trackball and clever lighting. The game design was credited to Dave Ralston and Mike Hally (along with programmer John Salwitz), with the strange name, said to derive from 'Also Known As Another Ralston Hally production'. While testing, feedback said the game was too difficult, so it was not put into full production. Three complete cabinets were known to exist in the hands of collectors, and at least one had appeared in public at a few American events. However, there was some controversy when a playable ROM was added to MAME in April 2019. Allegations were made that the ROMs were effectively "stolen" by someone called in to help repair a collector's machines (not *Akka Arrh* itself). However, the ROM reached a wider audience, and the *Atari 50* compilation celebrated the game's existence – now further augmented by this Llamasoft remake.



Above: The arcade game uses flat colours to show the regions that limit explosions.



Above: Bang Bang, Jeff Minter shot me down - the Auto-shooting power-up comes in handy.



# IT ALL ADDS UP

The score summary screen helps you see how well you are doing. At the left are your scores for each level played so far. Scores in green are an improvement on your best, whilst those in red are worse. The score delta refers to your theoretical best score. As you play, the scores at the top right will tell you how far away you are from your best score for that level. Your remaining Pods stream in and out of the middle, with extra Pods added after reaching certain levels or having more than 100 Bullets left. The more Pods remaining, the higher your bonus. Your Bomb efficiency is rated like a golf score – to get a Hole in One requires you to clear the level with very few Bombs used. The efficiency was rated Albatross in this screenshot – worth 30,000 bonus points.



You earn a big points bonus if you survive the level without your Turret taking a hit. Another summary screen appears at Game Over, showing if and how your performance has improved during that game (score delta, Pods earned, and levels visited among the parameters).

point. There are local and online leaderboards to conquer, too.

The first few levels function as a tutorial, with onscreen messages guiding the player into how the game works. Later levels feature different playfields. Some offer “explosive symmetry”, reflecting explosions across the level to give more opportunity to hit targets. Others are split into sections, where the Shockwaves only travel across connected sections but “stop” at the edge. Power-ups are also added to the mix, collected by touching them with the cursor. These include the valuable auto-shoot and “Shooty Cursor” modes, and collecting a Power-up will also trigger a Shockwave. Another trick to learn is that “nipping downstairs” also clears any incoming enemy bullets.

As a fan of Llamasoft, I was always going to play this. But should you? There is something entirely different about this game. It is not an all-out shooter; there are times when you must be tactical and wait for the perfect moment. The options help you tailor the game,

whether that is a different control method (I recommend trying the Two Button option that separates Bombs and Bullets), the normal or hard difficulty modes, or using Resume Best to see more levels. In full effect, the Shockwaves and flying enemies can be dazzling – but it is never totally overwhelming, thanks to the sound cues (and onscreen text) that help you be aware of what is happening. The text is quirky and full of in-jokes, from achieving a “Jesus And Mary Chain” to the score summary responding with “I Say!” after you do well at a level. It was initially difficult to quickly recognise when I had to “nip downstairs”, but the audible alarm helped.

Ignore the nay-sayers, try something different from a great British game designer – and check out the Everything, Everything Llamasoft Collection on Steam while you are at it. ■





# FUSION

**Game** : Mini Metro

**Year** : 2014

**System** : PC, MAC, Linux, PS4, Switch, iOS, Android

**Words** : Melanie Honebone

■ I don't play many games with the sound turned on.

Clashing sounds and catchy tunes get stuck in my head and exacerbate my insomnia, so I prefer the peace and quiet of me, myself and I. If I must listen to something, it's often the Arcade 1Up *Killer Instinct* cab in the corner of the room or the dulcet tones of my husband killing zombies on our Xbox Series X. That said, I always welcome the beautiful sound design of *Mini Metro*.

This management strategy game involves designing subway networks for around thirty global cities. As a scenario progresses, new stations must be joined to the network. Each coloured subway line has its tone, and as you add new trains and carriages, these build into a cacophony of sounds unique to the network in play. Each symphony created is haunting and relaxing, but also sneaky and insidious.

There are several game modes with *Mini Metro*. In normal mode, you build for growth. Each station fills quickly with passengers, with new resources, such as carriages and tunnels, being released in every week that passes in the game. Stress builds, and the game ends when a station overcrowds. My zen-like peace is shattered further in Extreme mode, with no option here for train line routes to be edited once they are placed. Every frantic, reactive choice compounds to create a chaotic network unfit for purpose.

Endless mode brings me sweet relief in comparison, and it is here that *Mini Metro* shines for me. I'm drifting along with the flotsam and jetsam of sounds - placing or replacing my lines and redesigning my network for efficiency rather than growth. New stations can appear, but connecting to the network is without urgency. I can drift away in a daydream and ignore it for a while. If I don't connect a station, any waiting passengers eventually disappear, which suits me perfectly. They can catch a bus or a movie instead; I don't care. I am building for efficiency and have all the time in the world to do that.

Growth is limited, and I often battle my patience as the network gets more complex. Carriage placement becomes critical in maximizing capacity, and any improvements or alterations take a while to filter across the *Mini Metro* network. I often choose to end a scenario because I've given up trying to solve the puzzle of my inefficiencies in network design. Sometimes though, I restart a scenario to hear a different soothing sound of the city play out. ■









RETARD

OBSCURA

ODYSSEY

ODYSSEY

ODYSSEY

ODYSSEY



## RETRO OBSCURA RETURNS TO FUSION UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT. ALAN HAMMERTON TAKES A TRIP BACK TO A TIME BEFORE VIDEO GAMES.

■ Ask anyone under thirty who invented the video game console, and they will likely say either Nintendo or Sony. Those of us who have been playing games since the early 80s may offer the opinion that it was Atari; all are understandable guesses given the vast market share that these companies currently (or used to) command. The surprising answer, though, is a company that may be familiar to older American readers but almost unknown in the rest of the world – Magnavox, with its Odyssey system.

The Odyssey (or Skill-O-Vision, as it was initially called) was designed by videogame pioneer Ralph Baer, who developed his “Brown Box” prototype in the late 1960s. The system was demonstrated to several companies, who

all expressed interest in it, but only RCA wanted to develop it into a commercial product. Sadly, Baer and RCA could not reach a commercial agreement. Luckily, though, one of the executives on the RCA team moved to the Magnavox Corporation and persuaded them to take another look at the console. Even though it received an underwhelming reception after a demonstration, there was enough support for an agreement to manufacture what would become the Magnavox Odyssey in August 1971.

Odyssey hit the Magnavox dealer store shelves in September 1972, these shops being the only places to sell it. Figures are unclear on exactly how many units were sold in the first



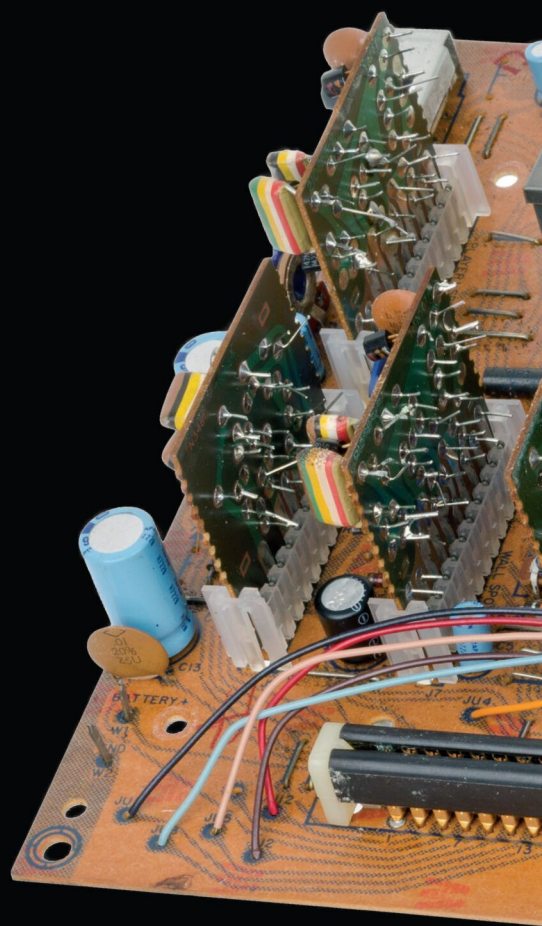
*All Odyssey images courtesy of Evan Amos.*



are unclear, year of release, but it seems that of the 120-140,000 systems produced, only about 60,000 were actually sold. Many reasons have been given for the poor initial sales, including Magnavox implying it would only work with their own brand TVs, the high cost (\$100 in 1972, or around \$700 in 2023 if you adjust for inflation) and customers' total lack of familiarity with the system.

What did your \$100 get you in 1972? Surprisingly, rather a lot. The box contained the system itself and the controllers and cables needed to connect it to the TV. Also included were twelve game 'cards', with a free 'card' being sent to the owner if they returned a survey card. Magnavox included many traditional board game pieces to accompany the games, such as gambling chips, fake money, and printed game boards. As the system could not display colour by itself, Magnavox cleverly included several coloured overlays that could be attached to your TV with sticky tape (also included) to give the impression you were playing in vivid full colour. There was even a set of batteries included to get you up and running. As you might imagine, the batteries and tape are almost always missing should you find a boxed Odyssey in 2023 – a truly complete system is extremely hard to find.

Opening up the Odyssey is akin to stepping



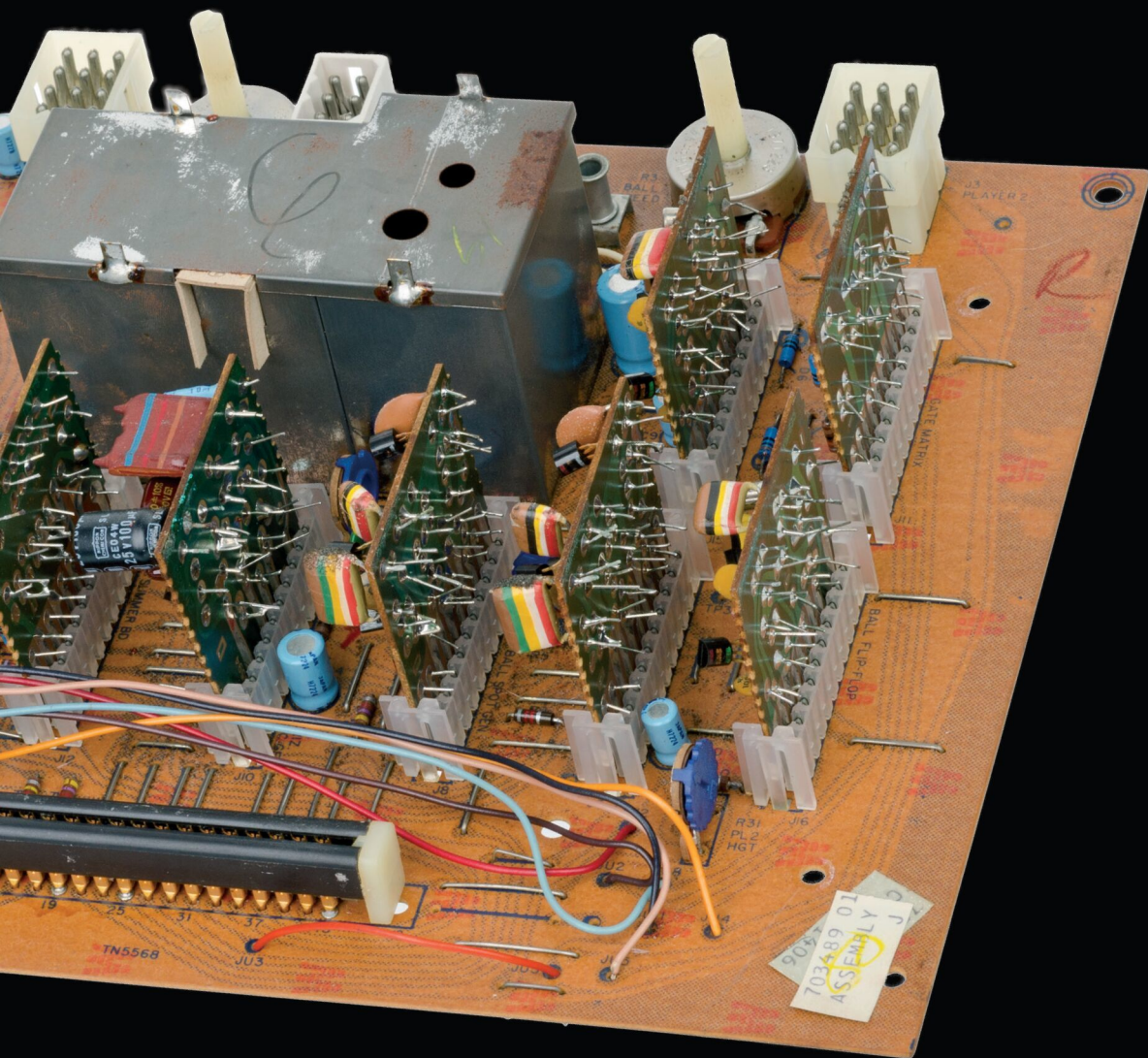
Above: Inside the Magnavox Odyssey and not an integrated circuit in sight.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING RIGHT NOW?

As part of the marketing campaign for the Odyssey, Magnavox managed to have the system featured in an episode of the American TV show "What's My Line". The show's premise was a guest would be asked a series of questions by a panel of celebrities so that they could work out what job they did. The episode featuring the Odyssey is fascinating to watch; remember, there were no video or arcade games at the time. Watching the panel trying to figure out what the host and guest were doing as they turned dials on a box held in their hands is incredible. Thankfully, this show can be found on YouTube, and I urge you to watch it. Just scan the QR code to the right to take you to the clip.









into a time machine, to an era before the integrated circuit. There are no microprocessors and no memory chips inside the system; everything is implemented by discrete components (resistors, diodes and transistors to you). Even though integrated circuits existed at the time, to keep costs down, they were not used. The game 'cards' were similarly simple. Although people may think they are similar to the cartridge games that came much later, they were just simple circuit boards. Each game 'card' connected the internal logic of the Odyssey to make a different 'game'. Considering that the system could only display three white squares and a white line, it was incredible that the Odyssey had a library of 29 games released over its lifetime.

Over time, the popularity of the Odyssey started to grow, which is why its discontinuation in 1975 might seem surprising, but several factors aligned to kill the system. High inflation in the early to mid-70s forced the manufacturing cost to increase significantly, but left Magnavox unable to increase the retail price. This forced the company to find cheaper ways to make these systems, which resulted in Magnavox contracting Texas Instruments to create an integrated circuit to replace the discrete components originally used. This move to a chip meant it was no longer possible to use the game 'cards' to rewire the entire system, which resulted in the Odyssey 100, the first of many dedicated systems that could only play a few pre-programmed games. These systems are the true forerunners of what was to become the 'Pong' console.



Above: Despite appearances, this is not a cartridge.

So what is it like to own and use an Odyssey in 2023? As you might imagine, it really depends on how you game, and the equipment you own. Forget connecting it to anything even remotely modern; RF is your only option. Even then, you will have trouble using modern RF tuners as the signal the Odyssey puts out is very weak. Older CRTs from the 70s and 80s will be your best bet, especially if you want to use the coloured overlays that came with the system. With enough patience, you will get it to work, but whilst it's fascinating to see the genesis of video gaming in action, there is not much here to keep most people entertained for more than a few minutes. That said, as an object, the Odyssey oozes 70s style.





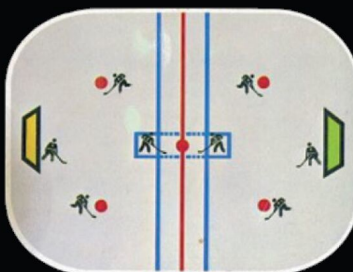
The understated-but-boxy look of the case contrasts nicely with the cool white colour and a strip of fake wood grain. Sitting in a display case, the Odyssey and its unique controllers look absolutely fantastic – it can quickly become the centrepiece of any videogame enthusiast's collection.

There were what we would term “video-games” before the Odyssey, such as *Tennis-for-Two* from 1958 and *SpaceWar!* from 1962, but Magnavox put the videogames into people's homes. Odyssey was Genesis for the videogame industry, and long may it be remembered. ■

## WHEN ATARI CREATED A STINK



**W**ho created what we know as “Pong”? That would be Atari, starting with the original “Pong” arcade game in November 1972. Had you seen the “Table Tennis” game on the Odyssey, you might be a little confused. Magnavox also thought Atari's *Pong* seemed a little familiar, so much so that they and many other companies that had created clone “Pong” consoles were served with lawsuits. It took until 1977 before Magnavox won its cases, although almost all of the companies involved had settled out of court by this time. Nintendo tried to have the patent invalidated, claiming “Tennis for Two” predated Magnavox's “Table Tennis” but lost due to the court ruling that the oscilloscope used for playing the game did not use video signals therefore was not a videogame. Ironically, Atari's “Pong” had helped drive sales of the Odyssey.



A TOTAL PLAY AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ALL AGES



# DRIVERS WANTED



The clock is ticking. Drive any of the 15 different vehicles from the agile Skyfall buggy to the awesome power of BACKLASH. As a member of the elite Blast Corps unit, your mission is to destroy all that lies in your path in a hard hitting, block busting, demolition mission.

64  
BIT POWER

94  
MHZ SPEED

3D  
ENVIRONMENT

STEREO SOUND

MEMORY PAK



NINTENDO 64



Get into it.



**IT'S EASY TO THINK OF GOLDENEYE, BANJO-KAZOOIE AND DIDDY KONG RACING WHEN LOOKING AT RARE'S HISTORY WITH THE N64. HOWEVER, THE BRITISH DEVELOPER'S FIRST OUTING ON NINTENDO'S LAST CARTRIDGE-BASED SYSTEM WAS A MASH-UP OF GENRES AND IDEAS CALLED *BLAST CORPS*.**

■ The story is set around a truck carrying nuclear missiles moving towards its target destination after the missiles begin to leak radiation. Unable to stop the continuously moving object, the *Blast Corps* team must destroy all the buildings in its path by any means necessary.

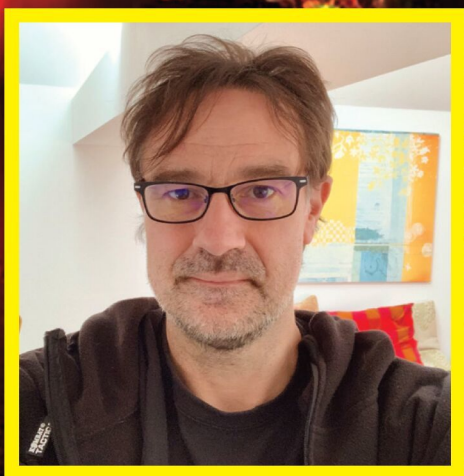
Each level features a destructive machine: usually a vehicle, but also giant robots, which you control in a race against time. Failure to destroy all the buildings in the missile carrier's path leads to game over and it's back to the start. It wasn't only this mad dash of destruction that made *Blast Corps* stand out; each level is filled with secrets and puzzles requiring different types of vehicles to complete the level. It all adds up to *Blast Corps* being an action game with added puzzles, shooter sections and adventure-style gameplay.

Martin Wakeley, the project's designer, explains how it came about.

"Chris Stamper, who founded Rare, had wanted to make a game featuring Bulldozers for a few years", Martin begins. "It had been started several times but never went anywhere. When I finished working on *Donkey Kong Land*, I was tasked with designing it. We had free reign on the project, and Chris Stamper once said, 'If you knock down buildings, it will be fun'. It sounds great, but static buildings don't pose much of a threat, so we introduced the concept of a constantly moving object. The player had to clear a path for it, and that channelled the gameplay and forced an element of peril."

It was a young team, many working on their first game, which got to work on producing *Blast Corps*. "We were all straight out of University, and the team was young and enthusiastic," Martin explains. "I was the only one who had worked on a game before, so it was all new to us – which was fun but also terrifying. Also, everyone had no real ties, so we had a lot of time to devote to making video games."

The game was designed around the new analogue stick still under development at Nintendo. Martin says, "When we first received the prototype N64 hardware, it came with this strange device, a previous generation controller. It had a strange-looking joystick stick glued in the middle that turned out to be the first iteration of the analogue stick. To be honest,



Above: *Blast Corps* designer Martin Wakeley.

**WORDS BY RETRO FAITH**



I didn't see the potential in it. In my mind, I was still thinking of a 16-bit isometric game. Only when I saw the demo of *Super Mario 64* at Sho-shinkai in 1995 did I understand what 3D gaming was all about."

Martin spent some time perfecting the controls with this new technology and received help from the leading man at Nintendo. "Initially, I tried to make the control mechanism for the vehicles all the same, but when we shared an early build with Nintendo, they had some suggestions", he remembers. "Mr Miyamoto thought all the vehicles should have their own characteristics and faxed through a diagram of how he thought we should use the analogue stick."

*Blast Corps* has many different gaming genres spread amongst its levels; racing, shooting, adventure, and puzzles. Martin felt this wasn't much of a challenge due to several factors. "It's actually pretty simple, and most of the game modes were just extensions of the core mechanics and handling. The team was also tiny, so we made the most out of any features we created. The benefit of a small team meant we

could sit around with a cup of tea and discuss all aspects of the game. The core game was a bit different because it was based around a constantly moving object which the player had no direct control over. They could only control what happened to it."

Martin not only had a new controller to develop a game for, but this was also Rare's first N64 title, and there was the challenge of learning the new hardware. "*Blast Corps* was released on an 8MB cart, and we even had a 1MB contingency for any last-minute emergencies, but nothing came up, so there is 1MB of dead space on the cart! The biggest extravagance was the explosions, but the textures themselves were tiny. The biggest was 32x32 pixels, and we effectively had only two texture sets, day and night. We used a polygon-modelling tool called MultiGen to create the environments. That was fun and cutting-edge technology. I think Boeing used it to make Flight Simulators at the time."

When asked about the graphical style, Martin explains, "We didn't really overthink it and just gathered references of interesting-looking places



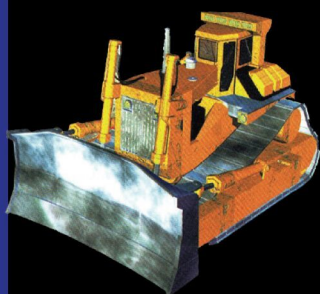
Above: Ramdozer is the first vehicle you pilot in *Blast Corps*, and it serves as an ideal introduction to the gameplay (N64).





# VEHICLES OF MASS DESTRUCTION

GET SMASHING WITH BLAST CORPS  
ARSENAL OF DESTRUCTIVE MACHINES!



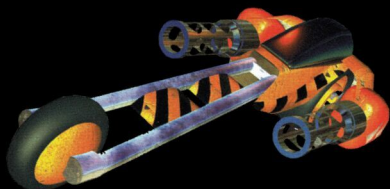
## RAMDOZER

A traditional bulldozer that simply rams into buildings and structures in the path of the missile carrier. It's excellent for clearing long, weaker buildings.



## BACKLASH

It takes skill to slide Backlash's armoured back end into solidly built structures, but you can also use ramps to launch it to devastating effect.



## BALLISTA

The Ballista is a motorcycle with twin rocket launchers used for precision destruction. It's great for destroying out-of-reach objects.



## THUNDERFIST

One of three robot suits, Thunderfist is a one-armed ground destroyer that somersaults into buildings while uppercutting with its giant fist.



## CYCLONE SUIT

A miniature version of Thunderfist, the Cyclone Suit allows players access to smaller areas requiring delicate destruction.



## J-BOMB

One of the best vehicles, J-Bomb has a rocket pack that allows it to fly straight up before crashing down on skyscrapers with a butt-slam attack.



## SIDESWIPE

Sideswipe takes down entire rows of buildings by slamming giant weights out of its body. It only has 20 smashes, so make sure to be accurate.



## SKYFALL

You must use the boost and ramps to send Skyfall into the air before crashing back down to Earth, straight through those buildings.





Above: Thanks to the epic *Rare Replay* collection, you can play *Blast Corps* on Xbox via Game Pass (Xbox One).

with buildings. And there were lots of references to the TV shows we liked – things like the *A-Team* and *Starsky and Hutch*. Initially, there was some internal resistance to the art style at Rare. It was once described disparagingly as ‘looking like a PlayStation game’, but we never saw that as a problem.”

Martin took the same approach of not overthinking the level and gameplay designs. “I used to design by creating interesting bits of environment I could play around with and then stitched them together to see if they were fun collectively. If it felt good, then it stayed in. We tried to get the flow right so there were never groups of similar levels together, and also we had to factor in the difficulty of the challenge. It never occurred to me there could be too much. I was conscious that carts cost a lot of money, so I wanted to make sure it was the best value possible.”

Martin feels that he would have changed a few things if he had the time over again. “Maybe I would have made more use of the 3D capabilities of the hardware, but I’m generally happy and proud of how it turned out. I would definitely have liked to have used the Rumble Pak, but we were offered it late into development, and I said no because I had some question marks about the implementation. I thought it was a gimmick with limited appeal, but it became an industry standard, and *Starfox 64* (aka *Lylat Wars* in the UK) ended up launching with it, and it certainly



Above: J-Bomb prepares to crush the building below (N64).

helped boost the profile and sales of that game.”

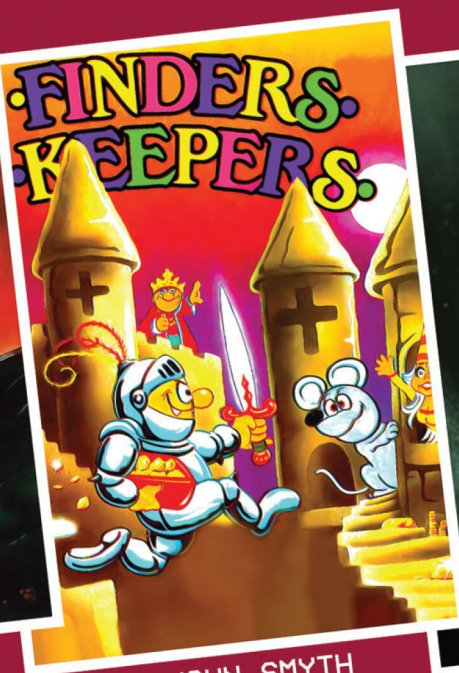
As his final thought on *Blast Corps*, Martin is happy overall with the finished game, if a little disappointed with the sales. “At the time, there weren’t many N64 games about, so you were guaranteed some sales, and it sold okay. I think the combination of a new intellectual property and a mix of genres was a difficult thing to market. It’s also very much of its time, and some of the gameplay is quite challenging. It’s a shame because if it had sold more, I would have loved to make a sequel at some point. It would have amazing potential as an open-world game.”

FUSION thanks Martin for taking the time to talk us through the making of *Blast Corps*. ■





OLIVER FREY



JOHN SMYTH



TREVOR STOREY

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# ATOMIC HEART

WORDS BY ANDREW OYSTON



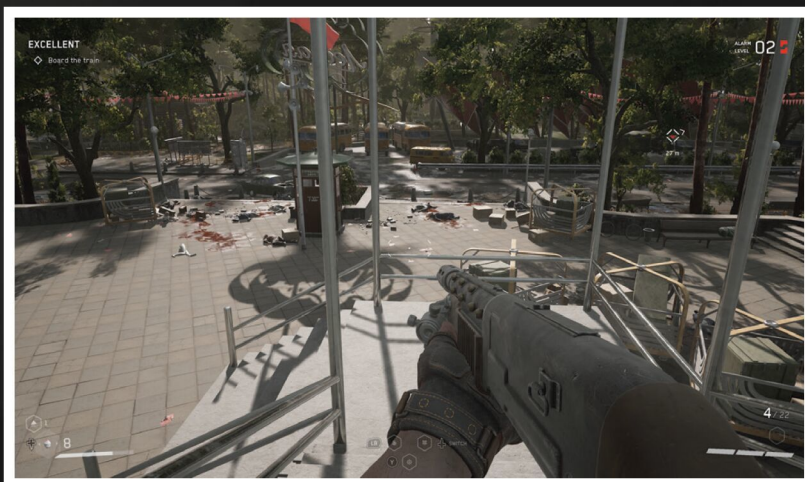
**I was about three hours into Mundfish's ambitious first release before the combat element of the game finally gelled. After a first half hour that was essentially a walking simulator (and not an overly good one at that), there had been enough axe-swinging and shotgun-wielding that I got it. Did this mean I would start enjoying the rest of the *Atomic Heart* experience?**

It's 1955, and you play as Agent P3, a Soviet army veteran with memory issues who has arrived at Facility 3826 just as Kollektive 2.0, a grand project to link people and robots into one giant neural network, is about to go live. Naturally, stuff has hit the fan, and after the thirty-minute exposition-laden walkathon, you find out that, metaphorically, you're not in Kansas anymore. Although, judging by your accent, you never left, but I digress. You could call *Atomic Heart* a homage to *Bioshock*, with its alternate history timeline shenanigans and visual style. But, while imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, something isn't quite right here.

As you journey through the

body-strewn ruins and corridors of the facility, which begins in a floating cityscape (Columbia says hi!), you use an AI-powered glove called CHAR-les to connect to robots and devices, as well as to vacuum up resources like a kleptomaniac Dyson. Thanks to a plot-friendly infinite storage "thing", whilst your carrying ability is limited regarding usable items, there's no limit on the tat you can pick up, which comes in handy later for crafting. The glove also provides added abilities like telekinesis, bolts of electricity and the freezing of enemies. Now, where have we seen those powers before?

*Atomic Heart* also has plenty of



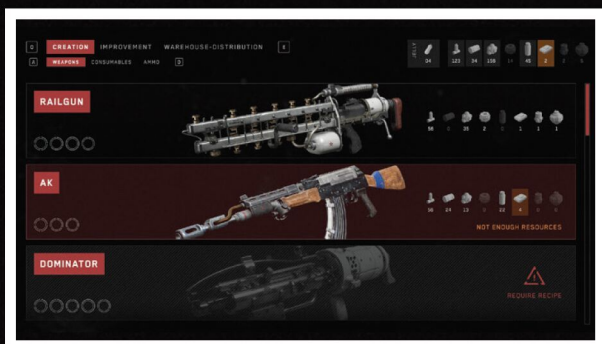
**Above:** This isn't a photograph of the Metro on a Saturday afternoon, honest.





Above: The waiter was less than impressed with my critique of the soup.





Above: Guns! Guns! Guns! The Railgun, AK, and Dominator.

melee combat and guns, the latter of which are doled out rather slowly but are upgradeable. Ammunition is pretty scarce, but you can easily craft more if you can find a NORA machine, which brings us to the game's combat. You'll have to fight off various models of humanoid robots, industrial machines, and some weird vegetables (seriously, sprouts are bad for you in this game). You can scan each enemy to see what they're vulnerable to, but you might already be in a battle before you find out your current loadout is entirely unsuitable for the task at hand. It was a notable issue during boss fights and required quitting, re-loading, and using the NORA you just passed to try again. It doesn't help that guns often feel less than satisfying even when they are the right option.

That isn't the end of it. The focus on melee combat is admirable but often makes *Skyrim*'s fisticuffs feel sublime. It's too easy to be surrounded by foes, and no amount of dodging will help as your panicked swings make little to no impact. Keep the medical capsules well stocked in your backpack!

There are corridor-based sections as well as open-world areas that, at times, feel more like slightly extended *Call of Duty* levels. You can approach either with stealth or all-out guns blazing, but where stealth presents itself as an option, there are usually too many ways to be seen, particularly outdoors. Often, it's better to race to the next objective, dodging enemies and ignoring the intricately built world you inhabit. In addition, puzzles and fetch quests litter the way, and it's surprising how quickly they become tedious.

With a merely average gaming experience at best, *Atomic Heart* continues to stumble. The story is humdrum, but at least holds the game together, even if it is stretched thinly over the 15-20 hours on offer. Delivery of the plot

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE



## SWEDE

Pretty straightforward: swing and a hit, maybe do some damage. Swing and a miss, prepare to hammer the dodge button. Easily upgraded, you'll always need to have this or an equivalent on you, and it doesn't take up that much room in your inventory.



## SHOTGUN

Ah, the good old pump action. There will be bigger and faster firing guns that you'll need in later encounters, but this will serve you well to at least the game's halfway point. You will need to balance your ammunition load, though.



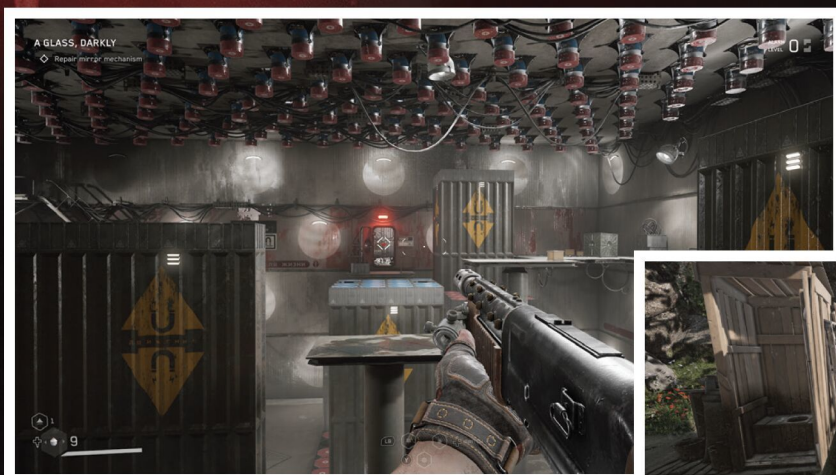
## ELECTRO

Another relatively early addition to the arsenal, this hand cannon is well worth upgrading as it takes up very little space in your inventory and has unlimited ammunition.

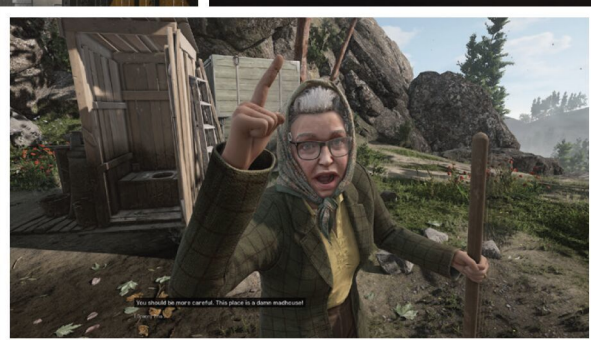




Above: *Atomic Heart* looks stunning, it's just a pity the gameplay isn't as welcoming.



Above: Oh goody, this looks like another traversal puzzle.



Above: Granny Zina is a highlight of *Atomic Heart*'s story.

is haphazard, with sometimes long traversal sections (those lifts at the beginning are just a taster) where un-skippable expository dialogue plays out between you and your glove. The backstory is left to emails and pocket watches that you collect on your travels, and if you miss something, tough.

Game world presentation is inconsistent, with in-world text in both English and Russian. Aside from one German, everyone else, including you, has an American or British accent. The script is, at times, truly terrible, with anachronisms aplenty. The worst is NORA, the AI-powered broom closet that hams it up as an innuendo-spouting, Harley Quinn impersonating vamp. Even P3 is annoying, either whining, complaining or ranting, although he makes a fair comment about the fetch quests.

If you thought it couldn't get any worse, it does. After several significant updates in the first week alone, the game is still plagued with stuttering, scenery sticking, animation bugs, and crashes. It's a shame, as after so much promise, *Atomic Heart* lacks consistency, has too many technical and gameplay issues, and left me feeling apathetic as the credits rolled. Hopefully, Mundfish will return with a more well-rounded and polished experience for their second title. ■





# SUPER STAGES

**GEORGE STURGEON FOLLOWS THE TRAIL OF LEGENDARY EXPLORER SIR FRANCIS DRAKE, UNCOVERING A SUPER STAGE IN 'THE SEARCH FOR EL DORADO' FROM *UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE*.**

■ The year was 2004, and Naughty Dog had wrapped up and released *Jak III*, their latest instalment in the *Jak & Daxter* series. With this latest project complete, the development team desired to create something entirely new and even more technically challenging. This new project was a third-person, fully immersive adventure game on a scale comparable to a Hollywood blockbuster. This ambitious direction was one that only the PlayStation 3 (Sony's latest console at the time) could handle. One could say that the developers were entering *Uncharted* territory.

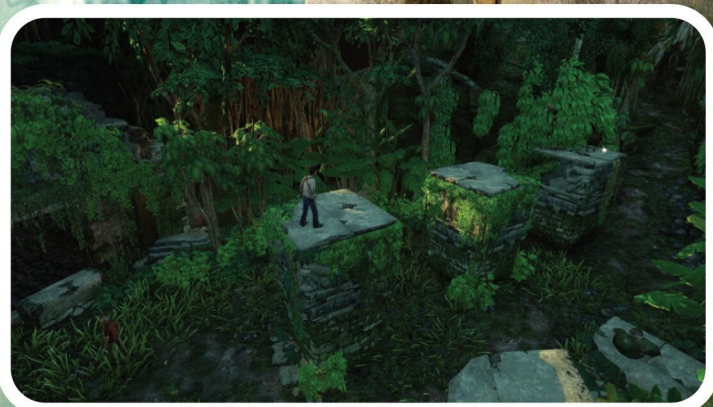
**T**he Search for El Dorado finds its fortune as a Super Stage because it's the first level where you can experience the vibrant world of *Uncharted* and all its mysteries. Beckoned to explore the Amazon Jungle as treasure hunter

Nathan Drake, the Hollywood inspirations are evident when the player begins wandering the jungle's lush green landscape and exploring the temple ruins within. Big-screen blockbusters such as *Indiana Jones*, *National Treasure* and *Tomb Raider* have likely inspired this technical masterpiece. However, what's even more impressive is that these influences feel truly realised once the heart-pounding action sequences come into play. Wooden structures fall away from beneath your feet, whilst large stone pillars topple behind you, serving up some hard-hitting, memorable moments similar to those we've seen on the big screen.

Whilst there are many other excellent levels to be found, *The Search for El Dorado* was the first real taste of what this new series and its world had to offer, and its impact on players was undeniable. The characterisation and talented voicework add authenticity to the budding sense of adventure. The interactions between Nate and his close friend Sully further solidify that *Uncharted* is a series with a cause worth investing in.

The goal in this stage for our treasure-hunting duo, Nathan Drake and Victor Sullivan, is to locate a temple in the Amazon rainforest and uncover the secrets within, hopefully leading them to El Dorado, a mysterious idol statue supposedly worth its weight in gold.





Above: Sunlight bleeds through the trees as Nate and Sully push on.

# UNCHARTED

## DRAKE'S FORTUNE™

**Super Stage:** Chapter 2 - The Search for El Dorado

**Game:** Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection

**System Played:** Playstation 4

**Year:** 2007, 2015

**Developer:** Naughty Dog





Above: Nathan and Sully follow the trail of the Spaniards and their treasure.

## LEVEL DESIGN

**T**his 3D explorative level is focused solely on platforming and puzzles. There are no enemies to be found here, so the need for weaponry is minimal, but it still has its use in the puzzle-solving sections. Don't despair, though, as the level does just fine without enemies to take down, choosing instead to introduce the player to the core mission of *Drake's Fortune* and its gameplay features.

Locations within this level include dense jungles and imposing ancient ruins, showcasing an impressive and atmospheric contrast between these settings. The upgraded technical power of the PlayStation 3 is evident as the sunlight cuts through the trees, casting shadows in an almost life-like manner. The combination of well-chosen camera angles and detailed shadowing give a clear perception of height and depth as Nathan traverses the ancient structures. Brief appearances of wildlife

imbue this stage with further realism when Nate's presence spooks a flock of crows, and then minutes later, a colony of bats zooming overhead take Nate by surprise as he explores a dark temple. The visual effects continuously impress throughout, and these little details solidify the atmosphere and engross the player.

Although the level is relatively straightforward, there's an ever-present feeling of exploration and discovery as you search for the sacred statue. The player makes some of these discoveries during gameplay, while cutscenes reveal others, and the combination works really well. Nathan's treasure-hunting buddy, Sully, is swapping stories and offering helpful tips and solutions to puzzles throughout your journey. Although he may not be playable, his helpful pointers and the amusing interactions he has with our protagonist impart the level's storyline with a great sense of camaraderie.

During the tomb-raiding expedition, the player can consult Drake's old journal for clues, which also help with navigating the temple's puzzles. Challenges and obstacles that follow will include tile-pressing trials, dangerous ledge-to-ledge leaps under pressure, and assisting Nathan's less physically-able companion Sully to overcome obstacles safely. However, the methods are typically achieved by explosive and hazardous means. Adding to the suspense,



34



## GR8-BIT

Our GR8-BIT just had to be when the wooden structure that Nate is crossing begins to crumble and collapse whilst the camera pans around to face him. As he starts to run towards the screen, you realise that perhaps you've seen this somewhere before. That's right - Naughty Dog has dropped in a scenario straight out of their PlayStation hit, *Crash Bandicoot*!

Below: Nathan traverses the temple pillars on the lookout for secrets.



explorers can expect the ground to be taken out from under them at a moment's notice. Still, it's a slow introduction, with the more dangerous threats gradually introduced in the latter part of the level. The player should also keep their eyes open for treasures by scanning for environmental glints. After all, what's a treasure-hunting adventurer without collectables to appease their inner collect-o-maniac?

In the audio department, the tribal-inspired soundtrack does a great job of providing a tense and mysterious tone. Meanwhile, the smartly applied sound effects keep up the immersion with serene waterfalls, the crumbling of the rocks, and the scraping of moving stone slabs.

The thoughtful layout of this stage and the events that unfold set the foundations for the following levels of *Drake's Fortune*. Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight and several sequels, *The Search for El Dorado* is a coincidental example of the Latin motto engraved within Nathan's ring pendant, "Greatness from small beginnings".

Despite there now being several sequels that have undoubtedly improved upon the foundations of *Drake's Fortune*, the game marked a huge achievement for the Naughty Dog team, and 'The Search for El Dorado' is a fantastic showcase of where and how the *Uncharted* series began. ■





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# FUSION





# FUSION MUSICAL MARVELS

**GEORGE STURGEON  
WANDERS THE WAR-TORN  
RUINS OF AN ANCIENT  
CITY, TELLING US WHY  
THE 'WATERFALLS OF  
AGHARTA' IS A STROKE OF  
ORCHESTRAL GENIUS.**



**Musical Marvel:** Waterfalls of Agharta

**Game:** Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

**System:** PlayStation 3

**Composer:** Oscar Araujo

**Year:** 2010


**Soundtrack Link:**

<http://bit.ly/3EOwaZL>

**SCAN ME!**







■ When people think of the *Castlevania* franchise's musical scores, they usually pick out one of the many action-heavy tunes that have become synonymous with the brand. However impressive they were (and still are), things shifted dramatically in 2010 with MercurySteam at the helm. *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* reimagined the gothic series through a darker tale and an incredible orchestral soundtrack that changed its musical direction.

**W**aterfalls of Agharta is a track that initially debuted in *Super Castlevania IV* in the early 90s (formerly known as 'The Waterfall') on the SNES. This title was a strong influence during the development of 2010's *Lords of Shadow*, with 'Waterfalls of Agharta' being one of the most impressive tracks reworked from their 16-bit origins into a 120-piece orchestral arrangement.

## SOUND DESIGN

**W**aterfalls of Agharta is a soundtrack composed by Oscar Araujo and is a recurring theme heard in several stages throughout *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*. It makes some particularly notable appearances


as an ambient background piece to accompany Gabriel Belmont on the journey through the city of Agharta, and during the platforming ascent to the top of the Clockwork Tower later in the game. This orchestral arrangement retains the subtle piano notes heard in the original track, which set a gentle tone, whilst the dominance of the violin gives an emotional depth to its melody.

Agharta's many flowing waterfalls enhance this track with visual and audio cues, helping paint the European epic fantasy landscapes of *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* in a similar light to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, capturing their rich worlds through the power of music. Its presence is calming, with moments of sadness as the player explores the war-torn city of Agharta. Its melody evokes the feeling of something far greater than your average video game soundtrack, bringing new musical potential, the likes of which were seemingly untapped until MercurySteam's gritty new vision of this world took hold.

## CONCLUSION

**S**ticking closely to the musical roots of *Castlevania*, this reimagining of 'Waterfalls' delivers a big-budget Hollywood blockbuster feel that the series fully deserved. ■





**MANY CARTOON SERIES, MOVIES, OR TOY LINES HAVE ONE ICONIC CHARACTER EVERYONE REMEMBERS. THEY WERE NOT ALWAYS THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE SHOW, BUT THEY OFTEN SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED THOSE WATCHING.**

■ I thought it would be fun to list those that had the biggest impact on me growing up. Some of these may be the same for you, though I am sure many of you will have your favourites. So, let's take a look at some iconic characters.

toy-polloi





# ICONIC CHARACTERS

## SKELETOR

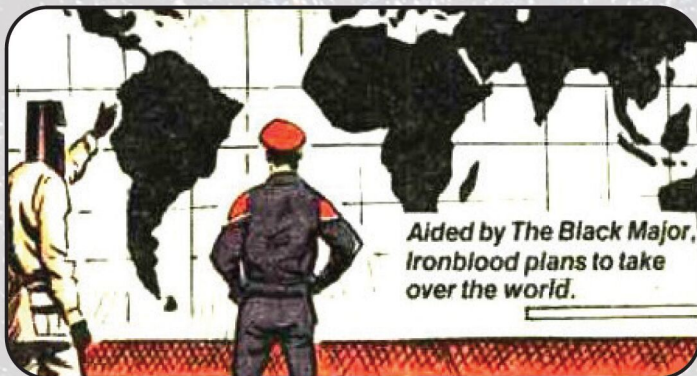
**S**keletor is probably up there as one of the most iconic cartoon characters of the 1980s, even more so than the show's title character, He-Man. He had a unique look, and an attitude that was hard to forget. A muscle-bound blue character with a yellow skull face who was permanently angry, he would put down his minions with his acerbic wit - "How unpleasant it is to see you, you snivelling coward!"

When you talk to anyone about He-Man and The Masters of The Universe, it's safe to say more people will remember Skeletor than any other character in the show. He's that perfect combination of evil and stupid; you know he will fail in his attempts to stop He-Man, but you still root for him. Skeletor is the perfect villain, and I hope he wins one day.



# BARON IRONBLOOD

The leader of the Red Shadows and sworn enemy of Action Force, Baron Ironblood. His iconic helmet, a piece of thin plastic wrapped around his head, made this figure stand out, making him look menacing, even if it was a bucket. Underneath the helmet, his face looked like all the other Action Force figures as they tended to use the same head mould for every figure, although they had given him a nifty moustache and soul patch. The bucket made all the difference in turning the same old figure into the evil mastermind I pitted my other toys against.







## WARDUKE

**W**arduke is one of those action figures you know is evil when you see him. I first saw Warduke in 1983, when LJN's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons figures hit my local Tesco store.

He was the first AD&D figure I ever bought. I was really into the Dungeons and Dragons cartoon series, and although these toys had very little to do with the show, I bought as many as I could and would make up my own stories and battles.

Warduke does appear in one episode of the cartoon series, 'In Search of the Dungeon Master', where he captures Dungeon Master and freezes him inside a magic crystal. It's a brief appearance. He sports a winged blue helmet with just his red eyes glowing outward, a half suit of blue chain-mail, and his shield, shaped like a demon skull. Everything about him is evil, and he makes Skeletor look tame. When I sold all my toys in my late teenage years, Warduke was one of the few figures I kept, and I'm glad I did.

## V.I.N.CENT AND OLD B.O.B.

**D**isney's 'The Black Hole', released in 1979, was their attempt at getting some of the Sci-fi movie love that Star Wars had accumulated for 20th Century Fox. Star Wars had many iconic characters and a few that kids loved, so Disney did all it could to copy that without actually copying it for legal reasons. Star Wars had the robotic pairing of R2-D2 and C-3PO, so Disney created V.I.N.Cent (Vital Information Necessary CENTralized) and Old BOB (BiO-sanitation Battalion). As soon as I saw the movie, I wanted both toys, but sadly very few figures were made, and they were hard to find in shops. I

found a V.I.N.Cent at a jumble sale a few years later, and it took me until recently to uncover the super rare toy of BOB. These two robots had the same odd couple partnership that R2 and Threepio had, and a lovely design charm. V.I.N.Cent is all clean and shiny, and BOB looks less than perfect, with many dents, damage, and parts missing.







## ZELDA

**Z**elda of Guk is another of those characters that, even though she has not been on TV for forty or more years, still gets referenced all the time on social media. And that means she must have had quite an effect on kids in the 80s. Terrahawks ran from 1983 to 1986, and although there were a few different enemies for the Terrahawks team to fight throughout the series, the main recurring villain was Zelda. She had a wrinkled witch-like face and cackling laugh that would be the stuff of nightmares for many a small child, which is why her image has lived on for so long. Now anytime there is a shot of someone looking wrinkly and old, there is an almost inevitable reply about how they look like Zelda. Search for Zelda on Twitter, and you will see what I mean. That's true brand recognition.

## 7-ZARK-7

I should also mention 7-Zark-7 from Battle of the Planets – a toy I don't own. Battle of the Planets was a re-edit of the Japanese Anime 'Gatchaman' that western TV producers felt needed a narrative adjustment. They added two new characters to help move the stories along; 7-Zark-7 and 1-Rover-1, his robotic canine sidekick. 7-Zark-7 bares more than a passing resemblance to R2-D2 with the added camp stylings of C-3PO. He never did that much in the show. He was mainly used to pass on story information and provide comic relief. It's likely the fact he looked like R2-D2 that makes him such a memorable character for me and the reason I started watching the show in the first place. Very few Battle of the Planets toys were ever produced, and I know of only one obscure European release resembling 7-Zark-7. If they made a toy of him now, I would snatch it off the shelf!







## R2-D2

I couldn't write this article without mentioning at least one Star Wars character. The problem is that there are so many iconic characters from the three (yes, three) movies that it's tough to pick just one. I love Darth Vader, the Stormtroopers, Snowtroopers, Biker Scouts, Jawas, Tusken Raiders, Boba Fett, etc. But the one that always has a place in my heart is R2-D2.

He doesn't have a face, and he doesn't say anything you can understand, but that doesn't matter. The way he moves, the scrapes he gets into and out of with the rest of the cast, and the fact he saves the day multiple times make him the most iconic character in the movies.

## STAY PUFT MARSHMALLOW MAN

The Ghostbusters movie is one of those classic films that everyone growing up in the 80s will have seen. The four Ghostbusters are the film's focal point but are not the first thing that comes to mind for many. That honour often goes to the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, who they battle at the movie's end. No toy was made of this monster when the film was released, and it took until the 'The Real Ghostbusters' cartoon arrived a few years later for it to happen finally.

Kenner's Real Ghostbusters toys are styled after the look of the characters in the cartoon series, which is excellent for the Marshmallow Man as he looks exactly the same. Made from a few soft vinyl parts, the toy does everything it needs to. It's bigger than the other figures, it's squashy, and you can use it to stamp other toys into the ground. As far as iconic characters go, he must be up at the top.

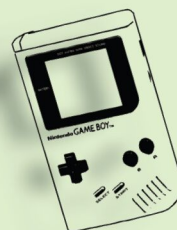
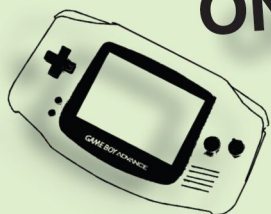




# GAME BOY

# ON NINTENDO

# SWITCH



**NINTENDO HAS FINALLY RELEASED ITS GAME BOY GAMES TO THE SWITCH ONLINE SERVICE TO GREAT FANFARE. RETRO FAITH GETS STUCK IN.**

are loved by many, and this release is welcome.

The games released so far are a mixed bag and contain some surprise omissions, most notably *Super Mario Land*, although Nintendo has explained that more games are coming. But considering the slow drip feed of games for the SNES, Mega Drive, NES and N64 emulators, it's doubtful that they will appear anytime soon. So, what has Nintendo released, and how good are the emulators?

Interestingly, the Game Boy releases are split into two emulators; one for the original Game Boy and Game Boy Colour, and the other for Game Boy Advance. In typical Nintendo fashion, you must buy the full online service to

access both emulators, or the cheaper package to access just the Game Boy and Game Boy Colour titles. Although the split may seem like a money grab, most gamers interested in this will already pay for full access to Nintendo's online services. One thing is sure; the Game Boy handhelds



## SUPER MARIO LAND II

## 6 GOLDEN COINS

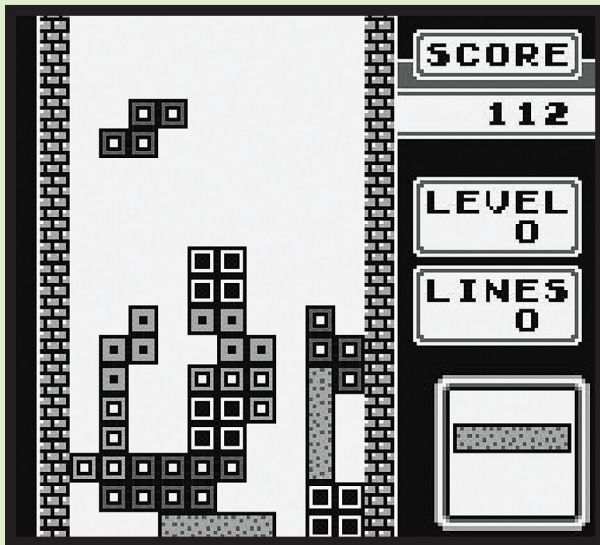


We might not have *Super Mario Land* in the initial batch of games, but we do have its excellent sequel, entitled *6 Golden Coins*. This release is notable for the introduction of Wario,



who would go on to be a staple character in the *Mario* series. In this traditional platformer you guide Mario across six different worlds, each broken down into several levels, to track down six coins that will open the door to Wario's castle. Although this is an easy game, some levels are so much fun that you may find yourself replaying them as soon as you finish, especially if you want to find all the secret exits.

## TETRIS



There isn't much to say about *Tetris* that hasn't already been said; Alexey Pajitnov's timeless block puzzler is just as addictive as ever. It looks great on the Switch screen, and hearing the classic music will urge you to keep going to beat your best score. With the inclusion of *Tetris*, it feels like the Switch is finally complete. For all the *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Metroid* titles, *Tetris* is still one of the greatest games ever, and it is most at home on a handheld device. Its inclusion here will entice many to dive into Switch's subscription service.

## MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT



**M**ario Kart is big business on the Switch, so the inclusion of another retro entry in the series will please many. From blue shell mayhem to Rainbow Road bliss, *Super Circuit* has everything you want from a scaled-down *Mario Kart*. Although the graphics and sound have taken a hit to squeeze it into a GBA game, you still have the three difficulties, 50cc, 100cc and 150cc, as well as forty tracks to tackle. This title plays brilliantly on the bright Switch screen, and because you can link four players over the online service, this is one of the standout titles on the GBA emulator.





## THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP



Possibly one of the lesser-known *Zelda* titles, *The Minish Cap* was released late in the lifecycle of the GBA. It is also one of the shortest games in the series, being only six short dungeons long. Experienced players will likely be left wanting more, but that doesn't stop it from being a quality *Zelda* romp with all the thrills and spills you would expect. One notable aspect is its bright, bold graphics, which are impressive given the limitations of the hardware. *The Minish Cap* is also worth playing to hear the fantastic score that stands out as one of the series' greatest soundtracks.

## KURU KURU KURURIN



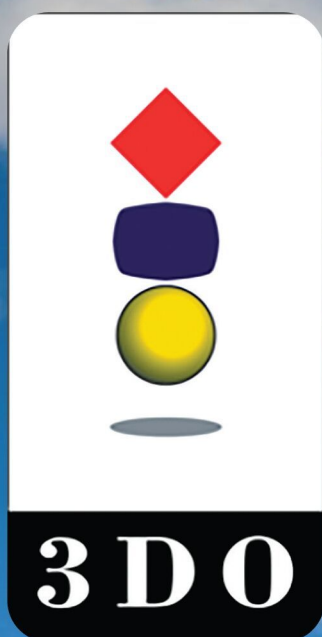
One of the more obscure inclusions in the initial batch of titles released is the tough-as-nails *Kuru Kuru Kururin*. Like *Tetris*, this is the perfect game to take on the road due to its addictive and simple gameplay that anyone can learn quickly. The game is broken down into several worlds, each with its own set of levels to get a spinning stick around without bumping the sides of the



track. Crash out too many times and you must restart, and you can use a boost mechanic to tackle the problematic time records. Arcade and puzzle fans will have a blast with this one.

The emulation for both handhelds is excellent across the board, although some games, most notably *6 Golden Coins*, experience moments of slowdown. These niggles feel as though they will be patched as the service improves over time, and there's nothing that spoils the overall gameplay. The controls are excellent, with the Switch layout proving perfect for Game Boy. If I'm being overly critical, not having a dedicated D-pad in handheld mode does cause the odd moment of awkwardness, but again, nothing that is an issue. You can select different colour modes on the original Game Boy to reflect GB, GBC and Super GB. There are also CRT filters and other options to create your perfect set-up. Overall, the GB and GBA emulators on the Switch are an exciting addition. Cost aside, they will provide hours of entertainment for handheld fans. ■





# Golf Games

**ANDREW OYSTON GOES ON A PUN(T) SPREE AND GETS STUCK IN THE BUNKER WITH 3DO GOLF GAMES.**

■ The 3DO's exorbitant launch price of \$700 in 1993 meant you probably had to be well-heeled to afford one. The console proved immensely popular when it landed in Japan the following year. The combination of an American demographic with lots of disposable income and a country famed for its love of the ancient game meant there was, naturally, a surfeit of golfing titles. Join me as we have a good walk spoiled examining this embarrassment of riches or, as Bull from Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves might have putt it, "To the Tees!"

## PGA Tour '96

We'll start with a solid drive down the fairway. As expected, *PGA Tour 96* is a solid EA Sports title that adds a heavy dose of next-generation shenanigans to its usual

annual release. You have three real-world courses, nine real-world golfers captured in digitised form, and a jolly amount of video and speech. It looks low-res today, but compared to the 16-bit competition, it was genuinely next-generation and played well too. I'd be remiss not to mention the cracking US TV-style piano and acoustic guitar work used to pass the time in the menu system. What's not to like?



Above: That's a real life player, you know (*PGA Tour 96*).





Above: Whack! Using all the 32-bit power the 3DO can muster to drive that shot far into the distance (*World Cup Golf*).

## World Cup Golf

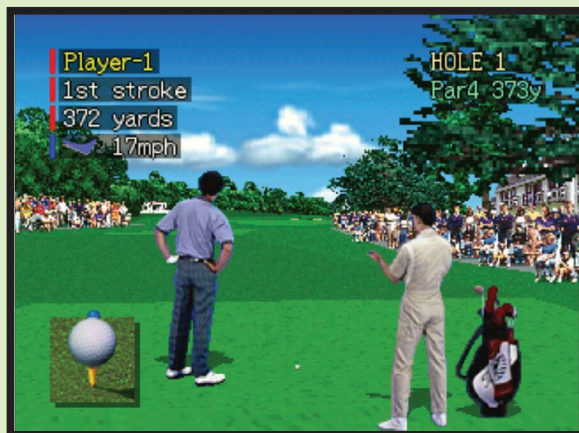
**W**e hit a water hazard on the next shot with US Gold's *World Cup Golf*. This PC title was ported to the 3DO, with later versions for the Saturn, CDi and PlayStation. You can tell. It looks, acts and feels like a PC game. There's no thought about using gamepads: there's a cursor for navigation, lots of options on the screen, and a competition feature that can be played without input from yourself other than to update the scorecard. You get some excellent Caribbean-style music, countered by the most boring voice-over I have heard in many years. Imagine a corporate video about electro-plating spoons - it's that exciting. When you get to play, the game itself is decent, but the overall effort is just too bare, and the control scheme needs work.

## True Golf Classics

**O**ne dropped shot later, we rummaged around a groundhog-day style bunker before hitting the green. T&E Soft was prolific

in their 3DO golfing releases, three of which are featured here. *True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf* gives you large, digitised players and some heavy-duty golfing piano music (surely a genre all its own?). The mechanics work well, but the single course and "ready-brek" style halo-ing on the players detracts from the overall package.

*True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club* is almost the same, with only a different course and some re-jigged presentation to differentiate it. You get fly-bys of the various holes, although the opening video has that 1980s quiz show



Above: You can almost hear the piano (*Pebble Beach Golf*).





**Above:** The apocalypse was closing in fast, but Dean and Rudy were determined to finish the day's golf (*Devil's Open*).

'prize reveal' vibe [A relaxing weekend break for two in Maesteg? - Ed].

Finally, there is *Devil's Open* (aka *Wicked 18*), taking the concept, players and presentation of the previous games and wrapping it up in some genuinely wacky CGI-generated video landscapes, with a soundtrack worthy of any Japanese console flight sim. The actual gameplay is passable, and you can easily miss your shots, producing an amusing animation. At least T&E got their money's worth out of the video capture, and it seems that only the caddy's change between each title. There is a fourth game, focusing on the Augusta course, but by this point, I'd gone all Nicholas Cage, shouting, "Not the tees! Not the tees!"

## Lower Your Score with Tom Kite

**L**ast, and certainly least is *ESPN Golf: Lower Your Score with Tom Kite*, a title that

screams at reviewers to take the hint. Much as hitting the 19th hole is as related to the actual game of golf as beer-pong is to tennis, this quad pack of discs has zero gameplay. Instead, you can watch hours (literally) of Tom Kite telling you how to perform your best on the golf course. A dreaded "edutainment" release, you could have just paid something like \$30 for a VHS equivalent rather than north of \$750 for this 3DO spectacular. Just think of all of the beer-pong money you would have had.

**T**his was a transition period for golfing titles as technology advanced from sprites to video capture, 2D maps to video fly-bys, and more realistic courses. This selection of games highlights that trend, from the almost Amiga-like *World Cup Golf*, via the more next-gen T&E Soft examples, to what would become the de-facto home of real-world golfing games for the next couple of decades, EA Sports. It could also be an allegory for developing console capabilities, but that's out of bounds for now, so we'll stick a pin in it [Sigh - Ed]. ■



# HYBRID HEAVEN™

ハイブリッドヘブン





**ALIENS, CLONES, ROBOTS,  
HYBRIDS, AND LEVELLING UP  
YOUR LIMBS INDIVIDUALLY;  
BEN HONEBONE LOOKS BACK  
AT KONAMI'S UNIQUE 3D  
ACTION-ADVENTURE RPG.**

■ The March 1999 issue of N64 Magazine featured an enthusiastic six-page preview of *Hybrid Heaven*. It was laced with the tagline, “*Metal Gear Solid*? Pshaw. Konami pulls out all the stops to bring N64 owners one of 1999’s most jaw-dropping games”, and while opinion regarding the height of player’s jaws was somewhat divided on the game’s release, the part about out-doing *Metal Gear Solid* rings true. ‘Konami Osaka’ began the development of *Hybrid Heaven* while ‘Konami Japan’ was still working on the future PlayStation classic, determined to make their mark on the burgeoning 3D action-adventure landscape via the N64.

**H**ybrid Heaven’s story just about makes sense by the time you get to the end of it, but initially, it isn’t very clear. You play as Mr Diaz, a hybrid composed of human and alien DNA created by a race of aliens who (naturally) want to conquer Earth by replacing its leaders with clones. At the start of the game, you turn on your creators by killing the clone set to replace the President of the United States. Having presumably gone rogue, you must now fight through the aliens’ underground facility, where an army of clones, hybrids, and robots await you, all eager to apprehend the ‘traitor’.

Sounds simple enough, right? Nope. It transpires that you are not Mr Diaz; you’re Johnny Slater, the President’s bodyguard, and the aliens have altered you to look like Mr Diaz. You see, not all the aliens believe in the genetic experiments taking place in the underground facility and didn’t want to come to Earth in the first place. A rebellion is taking place, with Slater at the centre of it.

*Hybrid Heaven*’s paranoid plot is complemented by its atmospheric audio-visual design. The laboratories and tunnels of the alien facility are cavernous, conveying an intimidating sense



Above: This clone falls for your disguise.

Above: Landing a nice throw on a hybrid.

Above: This screenshot cannot show you how the room rotates around the platform you are standing on - it's cool!



of scale as you make your way deeper inside. Excellent sound effects and a distinctly 90s soundtrack add to *Hybrid Heaven's* immersive charm. For players possessing the N64's 4MB Expansion Pack, *Hybrid Heaven* can be experienced in a high-res mode that considerably increases the graphics' quality, but at the frame rate's expense. Unfortunately, using this mode turns the game into a juddering disaster.

What set *Hybrid Heaven's* gameplay apart from many of its peers at the time was its mix of third-person exploration with RPG-style turn-based combat. While our protagonist can run, jump, climb, and take care of mechanical pests with his gun, approaching an alien hybrid or similar antagonist triggers a fight sequence, locking you in the area until the fight ends. Circling your opponent with the analogue stick, you must choose the right moment to attack, and upon doing so, the action freezes, and you must choose which limb to attack with and what type of attack to use. Your opponent then decides whether to block, counter, or evade the incoming attack, and you watch as the decisions play out.

At the end of each fight, you'll be graded on your performance and receive EXP for successful attacks. Each of your limbs has its own EXP level, and maintaining a balance in your body's

abilities is the name of the game. You'll also learn new combat moves from the cast of colourful opponents, which are added to the combat menu for use in the next fight. As the game progresses, you can learn some entertaining attacks that help you deal with the escalating difficulty of later encounters.

Upon its release, *Hybrid Heaven* divided opinion. Many reviews cited fiddly controls, sparse environments, and repetitive fights as the major drawbacks to an otherwise original, but confusing action-adventure game. Looking back, it's easy to see how this new IP's shortcomings meant it could not compete with the likes of *Donkey Kong 64*, *Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness*, or even *Jet Force Gemini*, which were all released for Christmas in 1999. But time has been kind to *Hybrid Heaven*. In 2023, the game's technical limitations blend with the rest of the N64's ageing catalogue, allowing the story, visual style, and gameplay to be appreciated without such rigid comparison.

At a time when developers were discovering what was possible within the third dimension of gaming, *Hybrid Heaven* stands out as one of the period's more interesting and quirky titles. And, like many such games, it is appreciated more today than it was at the time of its release. ■



Above: Avoiding your opponent while you charge up power for your next strike.





# THE COMPLETE ARCHIVE OF ZX SPECTRUM CULTURE AND ART

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**ZXART.EE**



**AFTER HIS SOMEWHAT CONTROVERSIAL DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE C64 COLLECTION 1 LAST ISSUE, PAUL TWIST DARES TO FIRE UP HIS EVERCADE VS AGAIN.**

Despite the title of this cartridge, it doesn't feature a game in which Alex Turner, Ian Brown, Shaun Ryder, and Damon Albarn team up to defeat evil - as brilliant as that would be. This cartridge is the second *Indie Heroes Collection* of "New Retro Games" for Evercade; it's the first to serve as an annual compilation of the previous year's 'Game of the Month' titles.

The "Game of the Month" programme was a genius move. Blaze made a different indie game available to download and play each month for Evercade VS and Evercade EXP owners, with the caveat that each game is only playable until you download the next title. Each January, Blaze then releases a cartridge compiling all the games from the previous year. I love this idea as it gives Evercade owners an annual treat to look forward to.

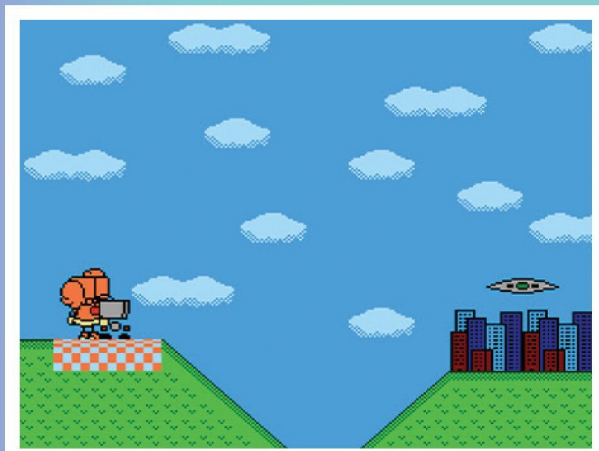
With the Evercade relying on emulation, the games on this cartridge were initially released for other (ostensibly defunct) formats, such as the NES, Game Boy, and Mega Drive, so these annual cartridges will also serve as a snapshot of new games released for old formats each year. The concept of the annual Indie Heroes collections is sound, but are the games heroic or



villainous? As with all such compilations, there's a bit of both, but I'm delighted to report that the heroes comfortably defeat the villains in this case.

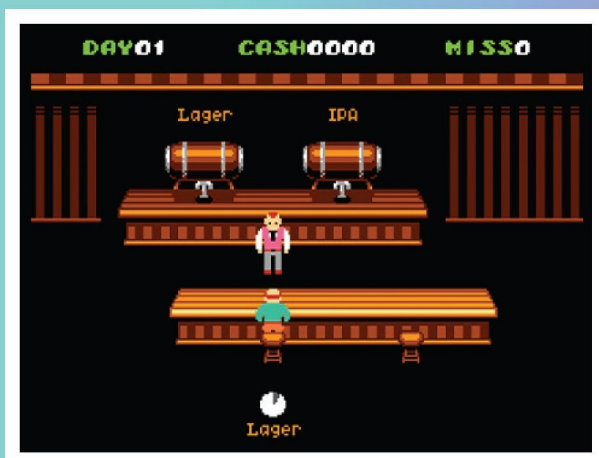
The Game of the Month programme began strongly with the splendidly-titled 8-bit puzzler *Tapeworm Disco Puzzle*. It is charmingly presented and fun to play, making it my favourite game in this collection. It's by far the best of the puzzle games on *Indie Heroes Collection II*, but more puzzling can be found in *The Gruniozerca Trilogy*, the most enjoyable of which is the first game, in which you must match your character's colour with the falling carrots before you eat them. Simple, but fun; it's like a pacifist, vegetarian take on *Ikaruga* (sort of).

If you prefer platforms to puzzles, you'll find plenty to put a spring in your step on this cartridge, such as *Nessy the Robot*, who, for legal reasons, definitely isn't based on a specific 8-bit console. This game's blend of shooting and platforming is a joy to play. Elsewhere, *Gelatinous: Humanity Lost* offers a slightly underwhelming



Above: Is Nessy a distant cousin of R.O.B? (*Nessy The Robot*).





Above: Unleash your inner Sam Malone in *Beer Slinger*.

Game Boy platforming experience, albeit with the tackiness of your character providing a novel way of traversing levels, by sticking to floors, ceilings, platforms, and walls to roll around them. Despite the title, *The Cowlitz Gamers' Adventure Trilogy* is a trio of simple but entertaining single-screen platformer collect 'em-ups.

The terribly titled *Yeah Yeah Beebiss II* is much less annoying than its title would suggest. This 8-bit game also has a surprisingly interesting backstory. The original *Yeah Yeah Beebiss* was advertised for release on the NES by a mail-order company in 1989, but the game was seemingly never completed. In the real sequel, you must zap a set number of enemies within a set time to complete each level, making for an exciting, fast-paced playing experience. *Eyra the Crow Maiden* is a 16-bit platformer boasting beautifully colourful graphics, but it isn't exciting to play. It's not a bad game, but it's not particularly engaging, either.

If you're looking for adventure, you'll find it in the captivating dungeon-crawling 8-bit action RPG *Anguna: Scourge of the Goblin King*, whose non-linear maps create a wealth of adventuring opportunities. *Nix: The Paradox Relic* is a 16-bit sci-fi adventure blending shooting and



Above: You'll need to zap more than 64 in *Yeah Yeah Beebiss II*.

exploration in the 2D Metroidvania style. While the gameplay is nothing to get excited about, the experience is elevated somewhat by the beautiful graphics and animation.

Meanwhile, wannabe Neil Armstrongs can live out their fantasies with the Game Boy title *Lunar Journey*. However, despite its entertaining sense of humour, it's not much fun to play unless your idea of fun is exploring a sparse environment to collect minerals. If you'd rather be a barman than a spaceman, *Beer Slinger* is the game for you! The classic arcade game *Tapper* clearly influences this entertaining but simple arcade title. However, trying to serve your customers their requested beer as fast as possible is still a blast - my second favourite game in the collection.

This collection of new 8-bit and 16-bit titles may not quite scratch the same nostalgia itch as playing our beloved old games, but it certainly scratches a very particular nostalgia itch for those of us who fondly remember excitedly buying 8-bit compilation tapes or 16-bit PD compilation disks for our home computers back in the 80s and 90s. It's precisely what I'd hoped for when I first learned about Evercade. It might not be packed with classics, and it's unlikely that you'll like all 12 games, but it's a solid compilation of "new retro" games.

*Indie Heroes Collection II* isn't going to save the world, but it is a fine collection of indie games. And, with puzzlers, RPGs, and platformers, there's plenty of variety on offer. ■





# FUSION



**Game** : The Callisto Protocol  
**Year** : 2022  
**System** : PC, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series  
**Words** : Ben Honebone

■ Anticipation for *The Callisto Protocol* was understandably high during the build-up to its release at the end of 2022. Developer Striking Distance showered us with exciting preview footage and interviews leading up to the game's release, building anticipation to a fever pitch. A new Sci-Fi Survival Horror game from Glen Schofield, co-creator of the original *Dead Space* at EA's legendary Visceral Games, it boasted impressive next-gen visuals and a new emphasis on close-quarters combat with gruesome, mutated prison inmates. With a remake of *Dead Space* set to release just a month after *The Callisto Protocol*, Schofield and his team had direct competition and everything to prove with this new game.

During the initial hours of *The Callisto Protocol*, one could be forgiven for believing the hype. The visuals are spectacular, dripping with all the atmosphere and realism that next-gen machines can muster, and complemented by some of the best sound design in the business. Actors Josh Duhamel and Karen Fukuhara are wonderfully realised in their digital forms, adding to the game's cutting-edge, cinematic feel. But something is wrong. Underneath all the window dressing is a combat system that feels like it's come from the same bygone era as the original *Dead Space*. The initial thrill of trading blows with the infected becomes repetitive and predictable after you've done it for the fiftieth time. The weapon selection is uninspired, and your loadout never feels exciting, only functional. The lack of genuinely satisfying gameplay undermines *The Callisto Protocol's* attempts to pull you into its admittedly frightening world.

Dubbed as the spiritual successor to *Dead Space* but unable to match the memorable gameplay and story of the 2008 game or carve a new niche for itself, *The Callisto Protocol* scores an unintentional victory of style over substance. It is still an enjoyable game in its own right, but one can't help but think that the developers essentially promising "the moon on a stick" didn't help *The Callisto Protocol's* chances of success. Any way you slice it, it over-promised and under-delivered. I remain hopeful that Striking Distance Studios will make a triumphant return soon. ■







# Blitzmasters Studio



## Gary Paluk's Story

### RETRO FAITH LEARNS ABOUT A LIFE-CHANGING MOMENT THAT LED TO A NEW MASTER SYSTEM GAME.

■ For Gary Paluk, it has been a life of learning to understand the tech that has led him to make a new Master System game. He had wanted to do it all his life, but he started when he first encountered technology and video games. “I’d spent a lot of time watching cartoons in front of the TV and always thought it was this one-way street. But as soon as the technology was there, I could get a concept that was two ways - you could interact with it.” He explains.

Gary’s sister also had some influence on the journey. “My sister was a little older than me and had a calculator when I was six or seven. It had this feedback response that, to me, was captivating. That led me to understand what was going on. I also remember my sister worked in the local chip shop, and I sometimes walked down to see her after she’d finished work. There was an arcade machine in there, *Galaxian*, and she gave me 10p to put into the machine. I don’t think I lasted very long, probably about five seconds before it was game over. But at the same time, something clicked, and I just knew that this thing would hold me.”

Spending more time gaming, Gary started



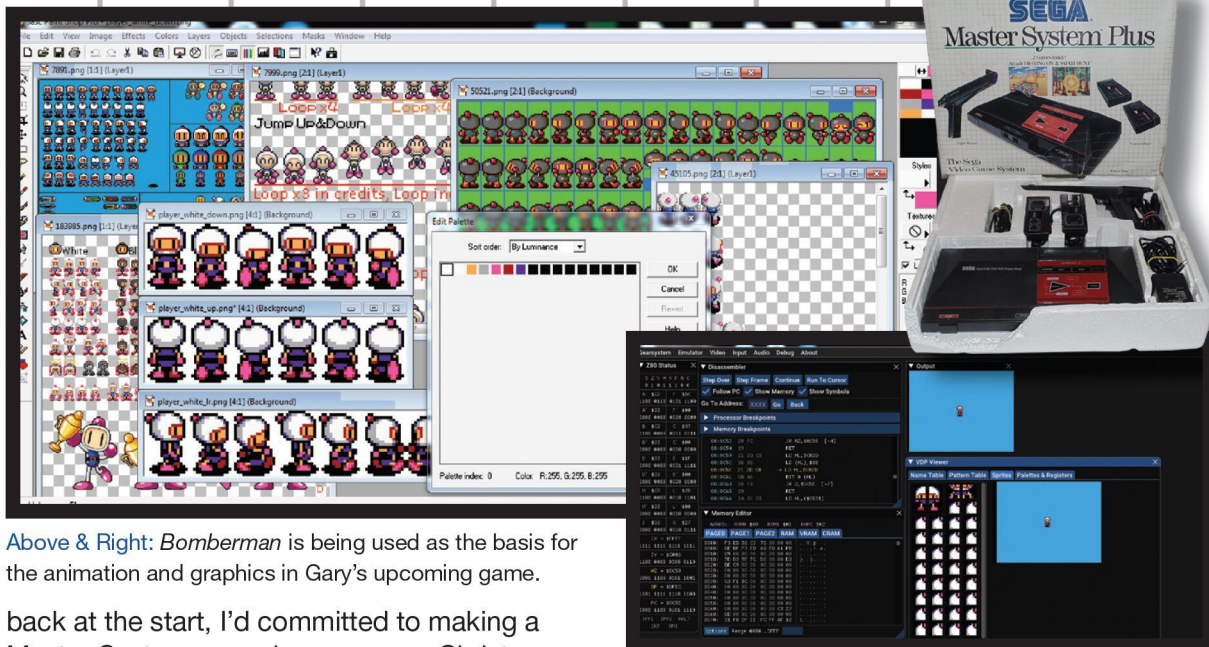
Above: Gary has always been interested in making a game for the SEGA Master System.

looking into software and coding himself. “I can’t remember if it was *Dig Dug* or *Burger Time*, but while playing it, I was interested in the game but more interested in the booklet that came with it. I could see quite clearly that you were able to write programs in it,” Gary says, delving deep into his brain. “The next thing I was punching in the hello world basic program. I thought this was awesome. I can make this thing do something that I want it to do. So I started loaning books from the library and, not long after that, begged my mum for a little computer.”

Gary started a career in programming but never forgot about his childhood love of Sega’s Master System. “So, that led to my career in technology, especially web technologies and 3D programming, for twenty years. But right







Above & Right: Bomberman is being used as the basis for the animation and graphics in Gary's upcoming game.

back at the start, I'd committed to making a Master System game because one Christmas, I received a Master System." He excitedly explains. "Christmas morning, I'm happy enough, but when I opened the Sega Master System Plus, I began leaping around. So that is a good nostalgic feeling that comes to me over and over again."

The system has had a significant impact on Gary throughout his life. "I went ahead and collected the full PAL Master system set, a bunch of the Japanese and the Brazilian games, as well as some homebrew. I've got a pretty large game collection, totalling about £50,000 worth of games. I was maybe twelve or thirteen when I played on the Master System, and I was intrigued about how you might be able to program for it."

It was then a life-changing moment that pushed Gary to finally start his dream project to develop a game for his favourite console. "Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with colon cancer, had an operation, and then had nine months of chemotherapy, which went well. I followed that up with liver surgery because cancer often goes from your colon to your liver. It's like a common problem, but I got ill after the operation." He continues these tough thoughts by saying, "the operation went fine, but cancer had come back. So I had to decide to take a little time on my well-being and mental health, but also to commit to doing some of the things on my bucket list."

Gary stepped away from his software development company to get well and begin the project. "My colleague Jack has been awesome,

and he said to go away to spend a couple of months doing what you need to do. Now I'm able to start building a Sega Master System game. I'm taking an existing game and porting it over as best possible, focusing on learning the architecture of the Master System, how you're supposed to deal with sprites, background tiles, scrolling hardware and all those kinds of things before then committing to a much larger production value."

The development is just underway, but Gary is excited. "So we're right at the beginning. I'm at the stage where I've got something visual. I would say I'm right at the very, very beginning. I'm talking to people across the forums and trying to lay down a foundation of knowledge and absorb as much as possible before I commit to the position where I'm saying I've started." He continues by saying, "So, it's more like little tech examples, getting things on screen, learning how to play sound effects. This morning I added a pause loop to see how that works, and I've got remote access to an Xbox Series S that I can quickly deploy to."

We will keep up with the game's development at Fusion and look forward to reviewing it. But for now, Gary is getting on with the job. He finishes his thoughts by explaining, "It's been such a fantastic part of my life that I want to give back to it. It's a gift for the fun and happiness that I've had over the years."

**Y**ou can keep up with Gary's progress via his social media - <https://plugin.io/gary/links> ■



# FUSION REACTOR

## A MONTH IN THE LIFE OF GAMING.

### THE FUSION TEAM

**JOIN US FOR A NEW FEATURE WHERE WE LOOK AT WHAT THE TEAM HAS BEEN UP TO OVER THE PAST MONTH.**



#### George Sturgeon:

I've spent this month exploring the sights and sands of Egypt with a great start to the Assassin's Creed series. Assassin's Creed: Origins marks my first real leap of faith into Ubisoft's franchise, as I've only dabbled in the past. I have yet to master the art of assassination ready for my visits to London, Italy and beyond. Due to Origins' lean towards more action RPG gameplay, it's undoubtedly a great place to start.

I've also recently finished a second playthrough of Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order on the PS4 in readiness for its upcoming sequel, Survivor, meaning that a PS5 may soon be on the cards if the bank balance allows!



#### Andrew Fisher:

Heating things up this month is the superb DLC for PowerWash Simulator – and it's free across all formats! Croft Manor gives you five Tomb Raider-themed levels, including some familiar vehicles and a T-Rex statue to clean. And the Midgar pack has another five levels with a Final Fantasy VII theme; you even get to power-wash the Scorpion Sentinel.

The major downside has been gallbladder problems meaning a stay in the hospital and surgery later in the year (on top of two other surgeries I was waiting for). At least I now have my Evercade EXP handheld to recuperate with.



#### Paul Twist:

For me, the most exciting gaming news was the announcement of IDW's Street Fighter Vs TMNT comic, pitting two franchises with long video game histories against each

other, "Cowabunga-hadouken!"

This month's been relatively quiet for me gaming-wise because I've spent much of my spare time watching Star Trek Picard from the start (I'm a casual viewer). However, I have found time to blast off on my own action-packed space adventures, thanks to some superb new shmups for the Switch: Wings of Bluestar and Graze Counter GM. The "a-maze-ing" NES puzzler Roniu's Tale on Switch has also captivated me.



#### Alan Hammerton:

Scorching its way onto my radar this month is Dragonflight, the latest expansion for World of Warcraft. Having spent way more hours hardcore raiding during WoW's Wrath of the Lich King and Cataclysm expansions than I should have, Dragonflight has dragged me back to Azeroth after a ten-year hiatus. Damn, I've missed this game. There are new quests, dungeons, raids, and more content than I could have ever imagined. I said I would not subscribe again – I did, I said I would not get sucked in again – I have, I said I would not raid again – well, you can guess how that went.



#### Andrew Oyston:

As a palate cleanser after finishing Atomic Heart, I finally began a playthrough of Lord Winklebottom Investigates, a fun point-and-click adventure full of whimsical, creative touches and a great voice cast. It's another sign that the genre that "died" in the 1990s is, in fact, in perfect health today. And, after nearly twenty-five years, I have finally managed to unlock the Aztec mission in Goldeneye 007. Brutal doesn't even begin to describe it, and given my advancing years and creaking reflexes, I guess I'll have to experience Egyptian via YouTube videos!



#### Retro Faith:

I have been so addicted to the Game Boy since it



## toy-polloi

## TOY OF THE MONTH

**M**odern phones are great for playing games, but sometimes a more tactile experience is needed, and Palitoy's Pocketeers offer just that experience. These kept me occupied for many an hour growing up. The Fruit Machine provides a simple entry into grown-up gambling without the chance of winning anything. It feels great in hand, and making the dials spin is very satisfying. Sadly, that's the best part. I must be getting old, as I would have played with this for hours as a child. Now a couple of spins is more than enough.



launched on Switch. I've already completed about six games and am looking forward to more being added. In fact, all the retro emulators are fantastic and add to the amount of fun the Switch is. Now, with the inclusion of the Game Boy and Advance titles, I feel that the Switch is the best console of all time. In ten years, we will look back and say that it was so intuitive and had some of the greatest games released for it.

**Ben Magnet:**

The month of March has been pretty good for me.

Not only did I snag a copy of Metroid Prime Remastered, but I've also been playing Kirby: Return to Dreamland Deluxe and getting deeper into Sonic Frontiers. The highlight has been Metroid. For years I've been yearning to play this adventure on a modern Nintendo console, and not only is it finally available, but it's every bit as amazing as everyone says it is. Kirby

and Sonic haven't been bad times either. It's fun to go into a colourful world with Kirby every once in a while, and the more I play Sonic Frontiers, the more I enjoy the open-zone concept of the game.

**Sparky:**

My month has been consumed with the Last of Us TV adaption and finally

picking up Part 2 on the PS4 to see what the fuss was all about. The TV show has been marvellous, with less emphasis on the infected zombies and more on the human aspect. Even non-gaming friends have become obsessed with it. Some of the easter eggs were great, and seeing the actors from the game featured was fantastic. As for the game sequel, I've gotten past "that point" and hated it. I feel that when it's adapted for the series, non-gaming folk won't like it either. Maybe they should create new seasons to cover the in-between years.

**Ben Honebone:**

I finished the excellent remake of Dead Space (twice) as the last issue

went to the printers, and then I got stuck into Atomic Heart. Unfortunately, I had to abandon my playthrough after getting stuck in the scenery and losing my progress more times than I care to remember - a shame. Guilty Gear Strive arrived on Game Pass, and I couldn't resist playing it again on Xbox, despite already putting a lot of time into the PS5 version.

Meanwhile, I have a mountain of new Amstrad games waiting to be played, including updates to two of my favourite games, Yie Ar Kung-Fu Turbo and Renegade Reloaded. I've also got my eye on the new versions of Final Fight coming to the Amiga and Mega Drive.

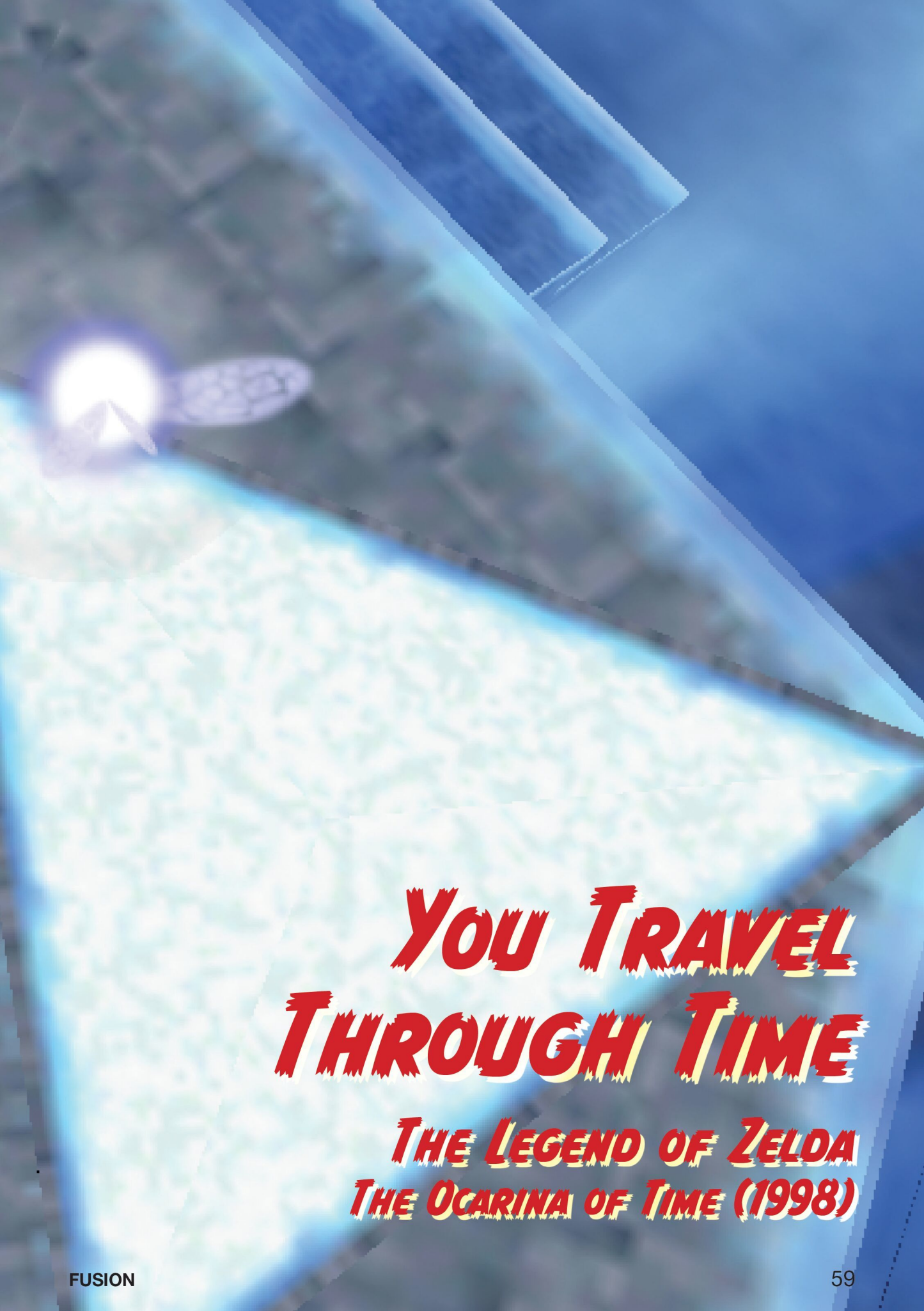
In the non-gaming world, I've been helping a friend move house, and I discovered that carrying a pool table downstairs is now a job for "the young", and I have become a "coordinator". Time flies when you're having fun! ■



# ***THAT MOMENT WHEN...***







# ***YOU TRAVEL THROUGH TIME***

***THE LEGEND OF ZELDA  
THE OCARINA OF TIME (1998)***





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